



Partners in Health

Of Maine

Compañeros en la Salud

Volunteers sharing the gift of health

December 2008

Our Mission:

Partners in Health of Maine is a group of medical professionals and technical experts who have given their time and expertise to improving the health care in Central America. Since 1976 we have been providing medical care, equipment, education, and technical assistance to the people of this area. Our belief is that caring individuals becoming "Partners in Health" with their third world counterparts can foster long-term improvement.

Hands on project for a Non-medical Volunteer, Puerto Cabezas

By Otey Smith (osmith@suscom-maine.net)



When my wife Nancy Egan, a dermatologist, decided to join a Partners in Health group trip to Nicaragua, I wanted to come along and help out however I could. I learned that PIH was developing projects for non-medical volunteers. They were identifying basic carpentry projects for those most in need. I could help with this.

This was my first trip to a truly impoverished part of Central America. Although I was not particularly shocked by the conditions, I was impressed that there was need everywhere. So on the one hand, small projects could unquestionably be helpful, on the other hand one small project is less than a drop in the bucket. Having said that, my little roofing project was gratifying for me and clearly an improvement for the recipient.

The project was to tighten up the house of a young woman, Maricella, aged eighteen, whose mother had died and who was taking care of her two younger brothers and her "retarded" older sister. Maricella made some money washing clothes in the river for other families. The house was a 12 X 14 foot building with a metal shed roof and raised three feet off the ground on poles as is common locally. It had been blown off its foundation and the roof blown away by hurricane Felix a year ago. Locals had put it back on its poles and patched a roof back on. When it rained, the roof leaked and weather blew in on the exposed east side so the four members of the family had only one small dry corner to huddle in.

On first assessment it was clear that much of the tin would have to be replaced, and some of the rafters. There were many challenges. I could not locate the tools at the bodega. There was no electricity at the work site. Maricella, the head of the household spoke mostly Miskito and a little Spanish and I speak only a few words of Spanish. I would be working mostly alone. It was really hot. I had only four days to organize and complete the project and I felt strongly that I had to complete the project since it would have been unconscionable to leave Maricella with no roof over her head.

Patricia Ballesteros and I estimated what supplies we would need and procured them. Patricia managed to get me a helper, a cousin of Maricella named Johnny. He was inexperienced but a very hard and willing worker. After building a ladder and getting on the roof, we tore the whole roof off. Closer inspection revealed a lot of rot and a lot of very marginal roofing tin. We ended up replacing all the rafters and all the roofing. The best of the old roofing we used to weatherize the east side of the house. We finished in three days, the total expenses were in the vicinity of \$500, and now Maricella and her family are protected from the rain. It was time and money well spent.

Partners In Health Guesthouse, Puerto Cabezas

By Jill Grant (jgrant6198@aol.com)

I have just returned from Nicaragua feeling that our house is really coming to life. This year we have had many visitors using and enjoying the house. We have had a pre-med student Jessica, and her friend Zoë, stay for a month. They learned a lot about the practice of medicine in the third world. They also painted a lovely mural in our new exam room. Dr. Bach had two groups stay at the house and enjoy the home-like surroundings. Joshua Wolfe, while filming a documentary on the Miskito lobster divers, stayed at our house. Rachael Singer is staying at the house for four months. She is doing an important pilot project on using the Filtrón water filters in homes. The objective is to develop a program that will introduce families to the benefit of clean water. Mary Benziger used the conference room for her ESL classes. The house was also used by the visiting Nicaraguan medical professors who came to teach endoscopy and urology to the doctors in Puerto Cabezas. The house gives our volunteers a safe and comfortable place to call home as they do these important projects.

We have just completed an exam room on the first floor. The exam room can be used as an additional bedroom. It has a full bathroom, which makes the conference room much more user friendly. On this visit many small regular maintenance projects were done including painting, new shower curtains, faucet repair, and general cleaning.



Fruit trees and flowering shrubs were purchased for the guesthouse yard. The cement block wall is nearly done and will enclose the whole property providing better security. A detailed plan has been drawn up for the use of our 90 by 60 foot back yard. The back yard was thoroughly cleaned and the fruit trees planted. There is space for a vegetable garden, a fruit tree nursery, and a gazebo with a woven palm roof. This will be a cool tropical place to meet, read or just nap in a hammock. There is much work to be done on the back yard for any volunteer with a green thumb. We will have plantains in six months to a year. The citrus trees will bear fruit in two to three years.

I hope this year to set up some workstations in the workshop area of the house for visiting biomedical engineers to teach Nicaraguan engineers some basic equipment repairs.

Volunteers need to contact me if they wish to stay at the guesthouse. There's a nominal fee of \$10/night. It would be a big help if you brought your own twin sized sheets and a towel to leave at the house. We have started a small library. Any type of book would be welcomed, from paperback novels to medical textbooks. This house has been a great project to work on and I look forward to another productive year.

Hope for the Future

A Message from our President, Dr. Robert Bach (*bob@pihom.com*)

It was an old man surrounded by enthusiastic youth. It was overflowing with memories of good deeds, reaching out, making friends, and having fun. Laughter always popped her head up whether we were crammed in the back of the Toyota on the way to Bilwas or painting the surgery room at 10 o'clock at night. Hope for this broken world is in the hands of our youth who are flexible and agile enough to bend over and pick up the pieces. I was blessed and enjoyed every moment of this wonderful time with the younger generation in Nicaragua.

This was the roster:

Molly Marston, my daughter
Natalie Jones, a junior high school student/ next door neighbor

Patrick Butsch, a UVM med student and former recipient of Gail's baby-sitting talents
Jessica, niece of Dr. Martha Ullman

Zoë, friend of Jessica
Natalie Cohen and Olivia Zurek, two medical students/friends of Patrick.

The first day we spent in Managua visiting our friends at the Lenin Fonseca Hospital, and MINSA. The direct flight to Bilwas was full, so we flew to Puerto Cabezas and drove to Bilwaskarma. We were packed tighter than sardines with just enough room to laugh. **Dr. Serapio Hunter** a well-known and beloved Nicaraguan surgeon, **Dr. Marisol Espinoza** an anesthetist, and **Sandra Taylor** an anesthetist were among the "sardinitos." Thanks to **Patricia Ballesteros** we found the living quarters in Bilwas to be a welcome site with its beds already made up with clean sheets.

The new OR also awaited us in Bilwas where we were able to do the first case on a woman suffering from acute cholecystitis. (Thank you **Mary Benziger** for all your work on obtaining the grant, and thanks to **Ted** and **Patricia** for making it happen.) **Molly, Patrick, Jessica, Zoë**, tackled a dental project applying fluoride to the entire student population in Bilwas. "Bilam Quacks" became a familiar term: "Open your mouth" in Miskito. **Natalie** earned the name "Yang" as in the show "Gray's Anatomy" because of her enthusiasm. On our trip back to Port we had no flat tire, but a roadblock of villagers protesting for land rights met us. We got through as an ambulance carrying a patient.

Once back in Port we lost **Molly** with her energy, organizational abilities and enthusiasm, followed by **Jessica and Zoë**, who plan to continue a sponsorship project that they had begun at the orphanage. Our youthful team was rejuvenated by two of Patrick's friends, **Natalie Cohen and Olivia Zurek**, both first year medical students. Work at the hospital began Monday at 7:00 am. They had scheduled 12 upper endoscopies in anticipation of the endoscopes that we brought with us. On Tuesday we performed the first colonoscopy in Port followed by the first bronchoscopy with all three Nica surgeons being very interested in becoming skilled in these procedures. We offered to sponsor a professor from Leon to continue the teaching, and a nurse to go to Leon to learn how to clean the scopes properly.

Both **Natalies, Patrick, and Olivia** enthusiastically spent their time in the ER and OR. They surpassed my expectations when they volunteered to paint part of the OR suite after hours. We used the color (dark blue) chosen by the chief of surgery but were greeted by such humorous comments the next morning as "es horrible."

We thoroughly enjoyed "Casa de Amistad" or more aptly "la casa de Jill" (our PIH guest house). For only \$10.00 a day you get clean sheets, a fan at the head of the bed, the company of one or more roommates, and a nice healthy Nicaraguan breakfast. Good work **Jill**.

We left on Saturday. As I looked down at Puerto Cabezas through the airplane window, my heart felt heavy knowing that I was leaving many unsolved problems as well as a part of me.

However, I was filled with encouragement by the enthusiasm shown by the entire group throughout the trip. There is hope for the future!



Dental Hygiene in Bilwaskarma

By Molly Marston, molly@oysteryachts.com



What a great trip! I really enjoyed being in Bilwas. I helped with the Dental Program instigated by Hanna Ekstrom, a veterinarian from Seattle. We applied fluoride and gave toothbrushes to over 200 kids in the primary school. The condition of the teeth in the younger children was discouraging. Many had complete decay of the baby teeth by the age of six. The adult teeth in most of the age 8 children were already riddled with cavities. The importance of daily tooth brushing was emphasized. Hopefully the children will continue to brush their teeth, but it will take a lot of encouragement to make it a common practice. We hope to have

volunteer teams twice yearly to provide fluoride treatments and reinforce brushing practice.

Improving Water Quality in Puerto Cabezas

By Rachael Singer, rms05@hampshire.edu

I am living in the PIH Guest House this fall and working very closely with Erna Patterson, RN on a project about waterborne disease and the role of an in-home drinking water filter called the Filtrón. In our study there are 73 participants representing 12 different families from several barrios across Port, ranging in age from 6 months to octogenarians. We have the support of the polyclinic and the clinic of Bilwi, who have been testing stool samples and donating anti-parasitic medications. So far we have



given lessons about the filters, common parasites and how to prevent infection, hand washing with the children, and dehydration. We will continue to monitor each family as they try to stick to drinking their filtered water and practicing preventive hygiene to secure the health of themselves and their children from diarrheal disease. Anyone interested in continuing this type of work should! It should be an ongoing project, gradually including more and more families, bringing more filters and more health education to the area. Feel free to contact me, rms05@hampshire.edu with any comments or questions!

Pathology Service Inaugurated

By Dr. John Benziger (thebenzigers@hotmail.com)

Our September 2007 goal to secure the future of the pathology service by having an official inauguration was postponed due to the devastating arrival of Hurricane Felix. Mary and I returned to Puerto Cabezas in February 2008 to fulfill that mission.



We arrived to find the Pathology Lab building spruced up, inside and out. The encroaching mold had been cleaned off the inner walls, and the outside was being repainted, thanks to Ted and Tania. Pathologist Jannine Tenorio, histotech Javier Carcamo, and cytotech Justo Saballos had cleaned and organized the interior in preparation for the Wednesday morning inauguration of the new pathology service and lab building.

It was an exciting and satisfying event. Hospital Director, Dr. Francisco Selva presented the Power Point summary that Jannine had prepared. Speakers included Jovita Marley of SILAIS, Marisel Corlson of the RAAN government, Puerto Cabezas mayor Elizabeth Enriquez, Ned Smith of MINSA Central, and me. Much appreciation was expressed and the value of the services was praised. We were given some lovely local woodcarvings and a certificate of appreciation. The event was shown on the local TV evening news!

I am hopeful that this public recognition will raise the visibility of the pathology service and solidify the government support that it needs to be self-sustaining. Pathologist Jannine

Tenorio seems to be reenergized and the number of cases continues to grow. I am more confident.

I also worked during the week with the lab team as well as Kendra, the cytology assistant, and Patricia Ballesteros to introduce the revised pathology and new cytology computer database programs. Hopefully this will bring us closer to having a reliable system that will help track and manage patient care.

ESL classes in Puerto Cabezas

By Mary Benziger (thebenzigers@hotmail.com)

Do people in Puerto Cabezas want to learn English? You bet! Having taken an ESL (English as a Second Language) intensive workshop, and tutoring a Korean woman in Maine, I thought it might be a useful project to set up an ESL curriculum for Partners in Health. Any interested volunteer can offer English classes at the PIH volunteer house. The conference room is the perfect setting. Lesson plans (stored in the bodega, and soon to be available on our website) are in place and easy to follow. I conducted four consecutive afternoon ESL classes with eight beginning students every day, ten students in total. John was my helper. It was very enjoyable and satisfying as everyone made significant progress. English can empower.



Good Results in Bilwaskarma Village Health Outreach Project

Dr. Bob Holmberg; rholmberg@emh.org

2008 has been a very productive year for our Bilwaskarma Village Health outreach program in the remote rural northeast region of Nicaragua where 9000 indigent Miskitu Indian are spread among ten villages. This region has had the highest child pneumonia mortality and malnutrition rates in all of Nicaragua with scant healthcare resources, preventive health knowledge and practice. The people live a primitive lifestyle of subsistence farming, fish the Rio Coco in ancient dugout canoes, have no electricity, and suffer regular devastations from hurricanes and inconsistent government attention.

The Bilwaskarma Clinic, which Dr. Bach and veteran missionary surgeon Dr. Halpert worked to develop after the war, is the region's center for medical attention. For years, however, maternal and child morbidity and mortality rates persisted at high levels with inadequate preventive health outreach.

Two years ago we introduced the community-based CBIO (Census-based Impact Oriented) village preventive health evaluation process developed by Dr. Henry Perry, (trained at Maine Medical Center) of CURAMERICAS in Peru, Guatemala, and Haiti. This past year the Bilwaskarma villages fully implemented the process and carried out educational campaigns on oral rehydration, early signs of pneumonia and need for antibiotics, infant nutrition, safe motherhood (family planning and prenatal care), childhood immunizations, and malaria prevention (bed nets and eliminating standing water.)

Early results have been impressive. Full immunizations rates in children under 4 yrs increased from 70 to 95%, use of oral rehydration in diarrhea increased from 86-92%, family planning practice increased from 32 to 49%. Health leader home visits increased from 282 to 459. There were five child deaths, all from pneumonia, emphasizing our ongoing challenges.

At our annual PIHOM team visit this November we discussed opportunities for further support and new grants for two key priorities identified by the villagers. The first is to develop small childcare centers for children under six in each village to provide safe care, nutrition, and developmental stimulation. Second, they identified the need to develop teen care groups in each village to focus on preventing rising rates of STD, HIV, and teen pregnancy.

We have appreciated the PIH volunteers who visited Bilwaskarma this past year including Molly Marston, Dr. Karen Burke, and Dr. Hanna Ekstrom. They have initiated a fluoride varnish toothbrush program for children, home vegetable garden project (soil and seed analysis at the University of Vermont School of Agriculture); chicken project; and training of clinic nurses and doctors in advanced obstetric life support.

Our annual budget for this growing Bilwaskarma Village Health Program is very dependent and appreciative of your support through PIH for our day-to-day operations. Please help and..... titan yamni (Miskitu for Good day!).

Women's Health/Cervical Cancer Project Update

By Dr. Max Barus, (mbarus@me.com)

In the past year we have seen progress in all the critical areas of the Cervical Cancer project. There is much to be done but we have established a solid basic structure.

We have had continued contacts with the Women's Movement, church groups and individuals interested in Women's health and cancer prevention. We see further collaborative efforts, such as improved outreach to remote villages, as a critical part of our preventive strategy.

The damage inflicted by Hurricane Felix on the Polyclinic has been repaired, with a long-overdue new roof. Pap smears are again being done there. The cytology is being done in the Pathology Lab, among the best equipped anywhere in Nicaragua. The database we created is now in full use and all Paps read at the Pathology Dept (as well as all surgical specimens) are entered and tracked in the database. This includes nearly all the Paps done in the RAAN region and will amount to nearly 5000 Paps this year. Dr. Ballesteros does Colposcopy weekly in the Colposcopy Suite and several of the Gyn physicians are doing the same. A recent equipment malfunction, due to a rat chewing on the colposcope cable, has been repaired.

We have taken early steps in standardizing referral relationships with the Bertha Calderon Women's hospital in Managua, in order to facilitate transfer of patients with advanced disease. There is more to be done in terms of transportation, housing and support for women and their families who must travel to Managua.

Vermont/Bilwaskarma Public Health Team

Karen Burke Karen.Burke@vtmednet.org

In January 2008 our team included: Karen Burke, M.D., Ruth Blauwikel, D.V.M., Nancy Zimny, P.T., Colleen Carris, Laura Balzer, Anna Hurlbut, Anna Taylor (Ruth's daughter), and Susanna Stone. All women. All Spanish speakers, except me, but even I am getting better. We had a fun and productive trip.

Ruth and Anna took care of almost 1000 animals. Rudy and Chester worked on the garden. We planted lots of vegetables. Susanna translated the growing, harvesting and seed saving instructions into Spanish. I told Eddy it was important to save seeds for the next year and to pass on to neighbors since seeds are expensive. I also talked to Eddy about collecting manure to compost.

We brought medicines and clinical reference books. The physical therapist on the team made consultations and taught nurses. We brought fluoride, toothbrushes, and toothpaste (all donated) for the dental hygiene component. I brought Spanish language books for all ages. The people in my department gave me used sports equipment to bring to the school. When the teacher saw all the soccer balls, basketballs, soft balls, gloves and bats, she said, "The children will die of happiness.

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Grants and Funding: If you are involved with service organizations that would be interested in sponsoring or contributing to one of our projects, please let us know (thebenzigers@hotmail.com). Lots of businesses have grant opportunities for employees who have volunteer projects. If you are reading this newsletter, you are part of our team!

We are so very appreciative of these extra monetary boosts that help us achieve our goals. The underserved, poverty stricken people of the RAAN appreciate our efforts.



Website: Please visit our website at www.pihom.com.

Molly Marston has done a great job of providing easily accessible information to all. Learn more about our history, mission and accomplishments, and see back issues of our newsletter when you visit our website.

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A donation to our annual appeal helps ship equipment and supplies that are so necessary for improving the quality of life for so many people. If you would like to earmark your donation for one of the projects that you read about in this newsletter, please do so on your check.

¡Muchas gracias!

