

Medical Practicum Report

Mulukukú, Nicaragua, January 2000

During the 18th annual Medical Practicum in Central America, and the 8th to Nicaragua, the medical team delivered health services to over 2500 patients in Mulukukú and the surrounding areas. We are extremely grateful to those who contributed to the success of this program.

Most of the medicines and supplies were provided by: Interchurch Medical Assistance, Inc., Blessings International, MAP International, Hoffman-La-Roche, World Dental Relief, and Oral Health Products. Fisher Scientific provided supplies at a substantial discount. Sanofi Pharmaceutical donated Aralen (anti-malarial tablets) for the entire team. Many groups and individuals provided financial support for the purchase of necessary medicines that were not included in the donations. All of the medicines and supplies were carried as 22 large checked bags on our flights and all arrived and passed through customs with us. Because our friends in Managua had diligently processed all necessary official papers, not one bay of medicines or personal items was opened for inspection. All medicines not used during our two weeks of clinics remain at the health center for use during the coming months.

Our team consisted of six physicians, a dentist, a pharmacist (all Manchester College alumni), two nurses, 14 Manchester College health science students, and family members. Because of the large number of professionals this year, our co-workers in Mulukukú were able to plan for off-site, or mobile, clinics for the first time. Thus some of our team staffed clinics in four different communities on various days to provide health services and support to smaller communities that had little previous access to medical care. As a result we saw patients who suffered from many types of skin disorders such as scabies and fungal infections, from malaria, and malnutrition.

We are encouraged by the continuing development in Mulukukú. We were pleased to see a municipal electrical generator powering lights along the streets and appliances in homes. Even more important is the brand new municipal water system which is already supplying potable water to many homes and was being extended even as we worked in the clinics. Other projects continue to exert a positive effect. The children's nutrition program now enrolls about 40 children who receive one meal a day at the center. Their mothers receive instruction in preparing more nutritious foods. These include soy milk and flour and leaves from plants rich in vitamins and minerals. They are added to the traditional diet of rice, beans and corn tortillas that are eaten three times a day. The nutrition program is being extended to surrounding communities as well.

The medical practicum is a valuable educational program for college students and professionals. It is often their first exposure to life in a poor, poverty stricken country. For the first time, they see the life style of a majority of the world's people and they face the reality of life where medical attention is severely lacking. We are privileged to continue the relationship with friends in Nicaragua who share with us their vision of a community which will become self-sustaining.

Edward Miller, Director, Manchester College Medical Practicum