

Report

MANCHESTER COLLEGE MEDICAL PRACTICUM, JANUARY 2005

During the 23rd annual Medical Practicum in Central America, and the 13th to Nicaragua, the medical team delivered health services to 1,295 patients (1,106 medical consultations, 189 dental consultations) in Santa Maria and the surrounding areas. We are extremely grateful to those who contributed to the success of this program.

Medicines and supplies were provided at reduced costs by Interchurch Medical Assistance, Inc., Blessings International, MAP International, Roche Laboratories, World Dental Relief, Fisher Scientific, and Bayer Corp. Sanofi donated Aralen (anti-malarial tablets) for the medical team. The total cost of medicines and supplies for this year's trip was \$6,167. All of the medicines and supplies were hand carried as 18 large checked bags on our flight and all arrived and passed through customs with us. All medicines not used during our two weeks of clinics remain at the Santa Maria Clinic in Nicaragua.

Our team consisted of five physicians, one medical student, two midwives, one nurse, one dentist, one dental assistant, an EMT, fifteen Manchester College students, one faculty, six translators and three family members. The group also set up a satellite clinic in Las Brisas, a small village near Santa Maria.

The group was large enough this year to fully staff the clinic *and* form two teams of doctors and students to attend small surrounding communities each day. Small settlements designated a school, a community building, or house as a clinic for a day and medical teams transformed the spaces into consultation rooms and a pharmacy. Work continued into the twilight with flashlights and lanterns that local people offered.

Doctors saw more pathology in outlying areas than they did in Santa Maria. Cases of scarlet fever and hepatitis appeared in communities that rarely or never saw physicians. Dr. Lois Johnson paid calls on patients she treated twice the year before, checking on the progress of a burn patient and a surgery patient.

Local Nicaraguan physicians talked with students and U.S. health professionals about diagnosing conditions without instruments or laboratories. They do an amazing job caring for a large community with minimal resources and show deep appreciation for the medicines and equipment supplied by the medical practicum, which last several months beyond the January clinic.

Now that we have been in Santa Maria for two years, we are beginning to recognize faces and build friendships. Though we bring much to their community in the way of medicines and medical assistance, often we are on the receiving end. Medical Practicum participants are not so much thankful for what they have at home as they are humbled by the vast difference between the haves and the have nots. As we settle into seats on the plane to return to the US, we are already thinking about how to change our lives so that others can improve theirs. The villagers of Santa Maria and the Medical Practicum all have good reason to be thankful.

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