

Report

MANCHESTER COLLEGE MEDICAL PRACTICUM, JANUARY 2006

During the 24th annual Medical Practicum in Central America, and the 14th to Nicaragua, the medical team delivered health services to 1,066 patients 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, World Dental Relief, Fisher Scientific, and Bayer Corp. The total cost of medicines and supplies for this year's trip was \$6,777. All of the medicines and supplies were hand carried as 22 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 nurse, one dentist, one physical therapy assistant, fifteen Manchester College students, one faculty, one staff member, three translators and one family member. The group was joined by three Nicaraguan doctors and 1 Nicaraguan dentist from the clinic in Santa Maria.

The 2006 Medical Practicum returned to Santa Maria, Nicaragua, to a warm welcome from the community. In a ceremony at the community center, the mayor presented us with the key to the city. We have traveled with the medical practicum many times and believe this delegation was the most successful at integrating with the community and making friendships among townspeople.

Life in Santa Maria proper continues to improve. The clinic does an admirable job with vaccinating children and educating mothers about health care, but outlying clusters of houses have many fewer resources, no electricity or running water, and much more disease. Patients must walk one to three hours to see a doctor most times of the year. Little health posts dot the countryside, but they contain no medicines and the two resident doctors at the clinic rarely make it to these distant populations with supplies. Each day we were there, we sent two physicians, four or six students, two translators, and a Nicaraguan physician and nurse to these communities by ambulance. During our two weeks of clinic, the most common diagnoses were respiratory infections, urinary tract infections, back and neck pain, parasites, and skin infections.

Manchester students took vital signs, worked in the pharmacy, shadowed doctors, and assisted with emergencies. They observed the Nicaraguan dentist in the second week of the clinic. The Manchester physicians were careful to teach the students at the same time they were treating patients. Doctors would take time to show students interesting conditions, demonstrate treatments, and model patient care through conversation and encouragement. Students were able to see not only a whole variety of pathology, but also gained an understanding of the work that needs to be done in the world in terms of education, economics, and politics that affect medicine and people's access to it. Students are consistently changed by the experience, more aware of their power to change things for the better.

On this our third visit to the community, the returning team members recognized acquaintances from previous visits. Lois Johnson visited with Danielson, a boy with a degenerative spine disorder. Eighteen months prior she had arranged for surgery to stabilize the spine, and now he is standing straight and running after the soccer ball with the other boys.

On our annual trek to Honduras, some three miles away, we encountered a bevy of children sitting at a crossroads, playing and talking. A little girl of six or seven years, scrambled after us calling out, "What is my doll saying? What is my doll saying?" When she caught up to us, she squeezed the doll's tummy so it would say, in English,

Star light, star bright
First star I see tonight,
Wish I may, wish I might
Have the wish I wish tonight

We explained the custom of making a wish when we see the first star of the evening. She didn't react much, but we have a feeling there is one little girl wishing nightly on a star for things she has only dreamed of. What does she dream of? Going to school? Having a little piece of candy? Seeing a city? Making someone close to her well? Experiencing peace in her family? We wish these things for her as well and give thanks for the support of churches and organizations that enabled us to see her beautiful little life and put our own wishes in a new order of priority.

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