

MANCHESTER COLLEGE MEDICAL PRACTICUM REPORT
January 2008

During the 25th annual Medical Practicum in Central America, which was the 15th to Nicaragua and the 1st to Ciudad Antigua, the medical team delivered health services to 1,261 patients and pulled 458 teeth in Ciudad Antigua and the surrounding 10 communities. 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 Accion Medica Cristiana. The total cost of medicines and supplies for this year's trip was \$7,552. The medicines and supplies not purchased in Nicaragua were hand carried in 22 large, checked bags on our flight and everything was cleared through customs within 24 hours. All medicines not used during our two weeks of clinics were given to the Ciudad Antigua Clinic.

Our team consisted of five physicians, one physician assistant, one dentist, one pharmacist, one physical therapist, twelve Manchester college students, one faculty, one faculty emeritus and four family members. Each day we helped staff the local clinic in Ciudad Antigua and also sent two vehicles to set up clinics in the outlying communities. Each mobile team contained two doctors, four students, two translators, a Nicaraguan doctor, Nicaraguan nurses and local health care workers. Some of these communities did have a health outpost building, but there were no medicines and the local doctors visited there infrequently, as diesel is a major expense. Mud due to unexpected rains made these journeys often 1.5-2 hours.

During our two weeks of clinic, the most common diagnoses were respiratory problems, parasites, back pain, head/neck pain, and skin infections. Doctors encountered more pathology in outlying communities than in Ciudad Antigua, including a case of leishmaniasis. Paul Fry-Miller, P.A., and Bill Fike, M.D., arranged for a wheel chair to be provided for a five year-old boy with hydrocephaly, who previously had to be carried everywhere by his mother. Also, our daily trips enabled the local health care workers to more thoroughly carry out their child vaccination program.

Manchester students took vital signs and major complaints in intake, filled prescriptions in the pharmacy, worked with doctors, and assisted in the dental clinic. The medical professionals in the group were careful to teach the students as they worked, showing interesting conditions, demonstrating treatments, and modeling patient care through conversation and encouragement. The hands-on introduction to dentistry provided by the dentist, Mark Shafer, was remarkable, resulting in at least two students now planning to become dentists. Several doctors, who had been on the Medical Practicum before, commented that the group dynamics and work ethic of the students was some of the best they had experienced. In general, students were able to see not only a variety of pathologies, but also to gain a perspective on health care within the context of education, economics and politics. They became better aware of why the world is the way it is and what avenues are available for them to effect change.

We were the first international medical team to visit Ciudad Antigua, within local memory, and we were clearly and warmly received into their community. A welcoming ceremony for us on the grounds of the local school involved an enthusiastic band, a speech by the major, speeches by other community leaders, and several dance performances by school children. Similarly, the night before we left Ciudad Antigua, a large fiesta was organized for us, involving presentations

of speeches, certificates, gifts, dances and singing. During our stay, the students organized evening soccer games with community youth. A number of the medical professionals played music and several nights were filled with the sounds of them sharing songs with local musicians. In short, a sense of community developed.

There is a Latin American prayer that reads something like the following: “You give bread to those who have hunger. You give hunger for justice to those who have bread.” Though we brought much to the Ciudad Antigua community in the way of medicines and medical assistance, we were also given an appetite for change. We began to recognize vast inequalities between us and the Nicaraguans, and to long for this unjust situation to be righted.

Since 1981, the Medical Practicum has been a guiding influence in the lives of many of its students. This year, the Medical Practicum has once again served as a catalyst for change, opening student eyes to possible vocations. Local residents and Medical Practicum participants have much about which to be thankful after our time in the community of Ciudad Antigua.

Jeffrey P. Osborne
Medical Practicum Director
Manchester College