

MANCHESTER COLLEGE MEDICAL PRACTICUM REPORT
January 2011

The 28th Medical Practicum to Central America was the 18th to Nicaragua and the second to the primarily indigenous Miskito people in the remote Rio Coco region of northern Jinotega. We conducted eight days of health clinics in the communities of San Andrés, Walakitáng and Somotignes, which are accessible only by river. This work would not be possible without the contributions of many people, for which we are tremendously grateful.

The medicines and supplies for this year's trip cost about \$13,000, much less than the market value of more than \$70,000. Most medicines and supplies for the clinic were purchased at discounted prices or donated from Blessings International, World Dental Relief, Patterson Dental (Spokane), IMA World International, and Acción Médica Cristiana. The medicines not prescribed during our clinics were left with local health care workers and represent a considerable contribution to the local health care systems.

The trip, while physically and mentally challenging, was highly productive. We saw 1,207 medical patients and 229 dental patients, extracted 694 teeth and distributed 300 pairs of eyeglasses. In addition to our traditional focus on acute care, we also screened for the prevalence of chronic disease to help guide local efforts, including diabetes, hypertension, and elevated body mass index. We also made significant progress in the fragile task of building relationships with the local people. One community leader said that, until our group returned this January, he was sure that we were never coming back. This return trip greatly enhanced our credibility with the local people and the outcomes were clearly worth the effort.

Our group this year included five physicians, two dentists, one pharmacist, 14 Manchester College students, four alumni with supporting roles, and one faculty. In Nicaragua, eight translators, an assistant, four health care professionals and 10 boat drivers joined us. The entire group traveled 230 miles round trip in five motorized dugout canoes to access the communities. We slept in hammocks in schools, used water from the streams, ate food prepared by the villagers, and functioned mostly without electricity or electronic communication. Prior to the clinic days, community leaders distributed a predetermined number of tickets for consultations. Overall, the prior relationships and arrangements made in advance led to notably smoother logistics than we experienced in 2010.

The Medical Practicum exists fundamentally to educate Manchester students who work with health professionals to provide care in an international, underdeveloped setting. We unmistakably achieved these objectives in 2011. Interacting with students, hearing their presentations and reading their daily journals reveal the profound impact the experience has on their lives. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. once said, "A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions." There is no question that the January 2011 Medical Practicum along the Rio Coco created new experiences and expanded dimensions for 14 Manchester College students.

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