

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY MEDICAL PRACTICUM REPORT
January 2013

After a year sabbatical hiatus, the 29th Medical Practicum to Central America was the 19th to Nicaragua and the third to the remote villages along the upper Río Coco, accessible only by river. We conducted eight days of health clinics in the communities of San Andrés, Amak, and Somotignes, which are of Miskito, Mayangna, and mestizo ethnicities, respectively. This work would not have been possible without the contributions of many people and organizations.

The medicines and supplies for this year's trip cost us \$10,004, much less than the market value of more than \$70,000. Most medicines and supplies for the clinic were purchased at discounted prices from Blessings International, Acción Médica Cristiana, and World Dental Relief or donated directly by Patterson Dental (Spokane), Manchester Family Dentistry, and Lhasa OMS. The medicines and supplies not prescribed during our clinics were left with local health care workers and represent a considerable contribution to their health care systems.

The challenging trip was productive in spite of the unseasonably large amount of rain. We performed 1,003 medical consultations, saw 185 dental patients, and extracted 287 teeth. The single-visit approach implemented for detection and treatment of cervical pre-cancers, employing CO₂ tank cryotherapy, had never been done in this region. In addition to our traditional focus on acute care, we also screened for the prevalence of chronic diseases of diabetes, hypertension, elevated body mass index, and *H. pylori* infection, with the goal of informing local efforts and treating patients. We also provided veterinary medical care for the first time, treating 42 cows, 142 dogs, and 207 pigs for parasites. The outcomes of the work were clearly worth the effort.

Our group this year included three physicians, one physician assistant, one dentist, one pharmacist, one nurse, 15 Manchester University students, one support person, and one faculty. In Nicaragua, nine translators, three assistants, three health care professionals, two watchmen, and 10 boat drivers joined us. The entire group traveled approximately 195 miles round trip in five motorized dugout canoes to access the communities. We lived mostly without electricity and running water and ate food prepared by villagers. Throughout, we continued building relationships with the people along the upper Río Coco. Our reception in Amak, where we worked for the first time, was especially warm.

The goals of the Medical Practicum are to educate Manchester University students by working with U.S. health professionals to provide health care in an international, less-developed setting. Interacting with students, hearing their presentations, and reading their journals reveal the profound impact the experience has on their lives. The adversities through which we persevered are being remembered as adventures. Future plans are being constructed upon the life lessons learned. The trip once again served as a catalyst for change, opening student eyes to possible vocations and to the human condition.

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