



Birth Technology - a wonderful asset if you can afford it



A modest delivery room in new Mother and Child Clinic in La Entrada. This clinic is a partner in the Manos Amigas medical network

We may rely on sonograms, dopplers and imaging equipment to help women during pregnancy deliver a healthy child. In the US we are blessed with accessibility to the most modern of instruments and tools at fully equipped medical centers, where unforeseen events can be expertly handled and developmental anomalies attended to in a matter of minutes after birth. Unfortunately, people in the underdeveloped regions of Honduras are not so lucky. Only the largest cities and surrounding towns have the physician and medical instrumentation to handle complicated birthing cases for a select number of residents in these urban areas.

Some outlying areas may have birthing centers for routine deliveries, but the *camposinas* (female agricultural workers) who live off the land and especially those residing at higher elevations in the more distant countryside and mountainous areas are woefully lacking in institutional medical facilities and physician services. Consequently, there is greater reliance on midwives and village healthcare volunteers, frequently referred to as *health guardians*, for information, medications and child deliveries. The work of the midwife is important but rarely are they adequately paid, educated or provided supplies to care for the village women, most of whom are their neighbors.

Midwives generally live in the same areas as the expectant mother, where they are known as *parteras* or “partners”. They respect local traditions and customs, thereby having the confidence of the patient. Blessed with the gift of compassion, most of them feel that they have been spiritually called. They love women and children, even caring for them weeks after birth.



Health guardian trainers meet with Manos Amigas Clinic Director, Dr. Sonia Bustamante (right), to discuss village healthcare program

Recognizing that midwives need accurate information to help protect the health and well being of women, babies and families, SATC has long been interested in starting a midwife and village health worker training program in remotes areas to introduce the services of our Manos Amigas Clinic to villagers.

Rather than duplicating the offerings or services of allied NGOs like Summit in Honduras, the Honduran Red Cross and government certified trainers, we have opted

to partner with them, offering a permanent clinic setting and support of educational healthcare programs. This way we can encourage uniformity in training, information dissemination and access to clinic doctors.

For example, this is how we envision our model working beginning in February, 2011...the MA Clinic clinic will serve as the training center, purveyor of midwife birthing kits, medications and host for certified trainers, relying on government sanctioned



programs and healthcare information. In-coming brigades from Summit in Honduras, a Colorado based medical group that regularly works in the Copan Region, are based at our clinic but travel to outlying, remote areas where they join up with village health guardians to attend to the needs of the sick. They make joint visits to patient's homes or villages and bring the severest cases to our clinic in La Entrada. Not only are they a source of information, point of contact with village elders, midwife and community healthcare workers there, but they introduce the villagers to the services available at the MA clinic, as a permanent, year-round functioning healthcare resource for them.

In previous clinic visits, specialists on the Summit in Honduras medical team introduced villagers to massage and acupuncture treatments as a way of relieving pain. Linking up similar interests and working together in reaching out in this part of Honduras offers a unique and synergistic approach that will allow all of us to do more than any group working alone. Simple needs can be met and treated at the village level, with more serious cases referred to the clinic. It also creates a bond between the village health guardian, midwife and clinic doctors when it comes to training, treating patients and improving healthcare in a given area.