

## Once is Not Enough - Geisinger Brigade returns with more healthcare help



For the third time this year, healthcare volunteers from Geisinger Hospital traveled to La Entrada to offer their services at the Manos Amigas Clinic in August. While some people in the states took their vacations during the summer months, this group of dedicated physicians, nurses and healthcare workers spent their hard earned vacation days attending to the needs of the impoverished in the Copan region of western Honduras. To participate in this experience, some in the group took personal sick days to make the trip and others were given time off without pay, but had to make up those days when they returned to the hospital. Except for two team leaders, their other nine teammates were “newbies” or first timers to the country.

The local people were happy to see these medicos, as word had been distributed far and wide about their coming to town. People walked from outlying areas - as much as two hours, just to come to the clinic with their medical ailments. This was as much of a new experience for these “distant” patients as it was for the visiting



health professionals.



With loving smiles, a few Spanish words and the assistance of interpreters from the local bi-lingual school, the team moved through the large crowds that had gathered on the clinic grounds each morning to see the sickest patients first.

There were relieved mothers who wanted their newborns seen and young crying children who were separated from their mothers just long enough to step on a scale.

All seemed pleased to be there and to receive treatment or medications as necessary, even if they did not know what to expect next. For some, this visit meant that other tests would be required, necessitating trips to a nearby laboratory to have blood drawn or perhaps “pri-ority” scheduling with a specialist or diagnostic imaging center in San Pedro Sula, 2.5 hours away by car – longer by local bus and nearly impossible if on foot.



For the students, this was not only an eye-opening exposure to medical conditions, but also inspirational. They saw what it is like to be a nurse or physician. Several said they will study harder now because they want to be doctors and help their people.

For a few, there was the dreaded news that they would need to go to the hospital - an

opinion they did not want to hear. For most patients, that referral was interpreted as the end of the road of life because to hear the locals tell it, most people don't come out of there alive when going in for a procedure. This is particularly troubling because patients typically delay until their condition worsens. Sanitary conditions in their daily living areas are far from ideal leading to high levels of infection and some people simply lack the financial resources to pay for hospitalization. Of course health education is lacking, ignorance is high and past experiences and stories of relatives or neighbors are seldom forgotten. It was common to hear, especially from the older patients, that they would not go to the hospital, but would leave their condition in the hands of God or that they would pray for personal recovery.



For the more typical conditions like malnutrition, headaches, fevers, parasites, infections and the cleaning or suturing of wounds, patients seemed to be all smiles, leaving the clinic after lots of hugs, smiles, kisses and of course a bag of pills, bandages or dressing changes.



Throughout the week, the generosity of the Geisinger group continued to pour out as blessings for their patients. For several patients with foot wounds and infections, they were told to change dressings daily and to wear socks or shoes rather than walk bare footed. These instructions were impossible to follow as the patients had no socks and others were too poor to own shoes. Undeterred, members of the team reached into their own pockets, pooled their limpera and purchased the proper footwear for young and old alike. This was the first time that these patients had ever worn or owned a pair of shoes.