

The Blue Baby – a Special Case for Humanitarian Assistance

There was the anticipated excitement and a special buzz in the air on opening day at the Manos Amigas clinic's first-ever brigade of doctors and nurses, all from Geisinger Hospital in Central Pennsylvania. Although the clinic did not open until 9:00 am, people had started to gather at the gates as early as 6:00 am. Jockeying for position, many felt they had increased their chance of being seen by the visiting doctors by securing a "good place" in line. Lacking any previous experience with the clinic, they had no reason to believe that as promised, all of them would be seen that day.

One of those early patients was a three-month old boy, born at home in a rural area, and brought to the clinic by his very caring, but impoverished mother. The baby's skin was grayish and immediately upon examining the child, the doctor recognized there were severe heart problems. This case was dubbed "The Blue Baby" and it became imperative that the child receive attention immediately. In the States, this correctable condition would have been attended to at birth and the child would not have been released from the hospital. Of course circumstances are vastly different in Honduras but where do you go to treat this type of condition?



For starters, the circumstances required an echo-cardiogram, preferably administered and read by a pediatric cardiologist - an impossibility in La Entrada! The attending physician was aware of only two such cardiologists in all of Honduras. He placed a call to one of them only to learn that the child needed to be transported to Tegucigalpa, a rough and trying five-hour trip by car, for this examination. The mother was frightened, never having been to a city other than La Entrada. How could she be expected to go to Tegucigalpa, the largest city in the entire country and find this specific cardiologist?

A representative from SATC, coordinating efforts at the clinic, was aware of the circumstances and went to see a special friend in town, who upon hearing the story volunteered his car, private nurse and driver to take the patient to "Teguci." This "Good Samaritan" was so moved by the circumstances that he picked up the expenses for this trip, including the lodging and food. Once the echo-cardiogram was done and read, it was given to a group of physicians visiting Honduras in Teguci from the Cleveland Clinic, a heart specialty hospital that would analyze the problem. If surgery were warranted at this time, they would identify a networking physician and hospital in the States who would take on this case – gratis!

A flurry of activity ensued. A former priest was contacted in San Pedro Sula, who has a mission to send children to the states for medical procedures. He had contacts with the airlines, US Homeland Security and the US Embassy. Meanwhile the mother needed to obtain a birth certificate, Honduran passports and travel visas. While everyone was awaiting word as to which hospital in the Cleveland Clinic network would accept this

case and attending to the myriad of details on behalf of this patient, we received a message that this young patient had died.

Even with everyone's best efforts the outcome could not be certain. Everything needed to be "right" for this patient. Sometimes the patient is so sick, the tissue or organs have deteriorated to the point that repairs could not have been made. Although this case did not have the "happy" outcome that was desired, this is but one example of the good works done by the Geisinger Brigade, the kindness of Good Samaritans and the type of extraordinary service provided by the dedicated staff and network of affiliated associates at the clinic in La Entrada. All of them worked together, trying to give this young patient a chance at life.