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The Newsletter of UNH Global Engagement

Spring 2013

MISSION TO HONDURAS

Stephen Gibson, a senior biology major at the University of New Hampshire, assisted developing communities and had a profound experience during a spring break medical mission trip to Honduras.

Please note: Stephen went to Honduras on his own. The New Hampshire Mission Team is not affiliated with UNH and UNH does not approve students to travel to Honduras, as it is on the U.S. State Department Travel Warning List.

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Steve Gibson with another member of the NH Mission Team at a clinic in Honduras

On February 21st, 2013 the 31-person New Hampshire Honduras Medical Mission Team travelled abroad to Juticalpa, Honduras to provide medical aid to needy and underdeveloped Honduran communities. Coordinated by the Olancho Aid Foundation, the New Hampshire Mission Team marked their 22nd anniversary last February. Volunteers ranging from 16 - 65 years of age, including high school students, pre-medical students, nursing students, a nurse practitioner, and a Cuban medical doctor, gave their time and expertise to provide much needed assistance to a developing country.

Before leaving for Honduras the entire N.H. team gathered donations of supplies from local hospitals, schools, pharmacies, and individual donors. These imperative supplies included clothing, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, hats, shoes, and medications, such as antibiotics, antiparasitics, antacids, and fungal creams. There was over 30,000 pounds of donated

supplies shipped to Honduras two weeks before the team travelled abroad.

Once the team and I arrived at the airport in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, we gathered onto an Olancho Aid Foundation school bus only to travel over 150 miles to Juticalpa. While driving through the nation's urban capital city there were many stray dogs just wandering the streets; security guards with loaded shotguns at food shops; and Honduran citizens walking around with machetes. As we drove away from the nation's capital and into the rural areas of Honduras, houses became far and few and stores and shops were nowhere to be found. The landscape eventually faded into just spectacular hills and valleys for which Honduras is famous.

As dusk approached, our team finally arrived at the Olancho Aid Foundation Volunteer House, where we would stay. Without delay, we all began to organize the medical supplies that had been shipped. Additionally, there were 31 overstuffed



suitcases filled with more supplies that each team member checked onto the airplane. Any personal belongings, such as a change of clothes that we needed, had to fit in a carry-on bag.

On the morning of February 22nd, 2013 the team and I went to visit the four schools that were founded by the Olancho Aid Foundation. Two of the schools were bilingual. My favorite school was the school that launched the entire Olancho Aid Foundation, the Nazareth School. Nazareth taught children with special needs how to cope and become independent in everyday life. When I visited, I met an energetic, outgoing and always smiling child name Bicry. A nine-year-old boy who has multiple sclerosis, Bicry first approached me to open a squirt gun he bought. He came back with a bouncy ball and stated his name to me with a big smile and a look of 'let's play' on his face. We instantly formed a bond and we ended up playing ball together for over an hour. We rolled the ball back and forward, played kickball and soccer.

Later that night I learned about an orphanage home that was next to the volunteer house the NH team was staying in. After the medical clinics I would go over to the orphanage and visit the children. We would play soccer out in the street. The children were very excited to have company and the nuns were very thankful for our donation of shoes, clothes, and art craft supplies we gave to them for all the children in the orphanage.

The next morning, the N.H. volunteers traveled to Empalizada, which is a very poor village. When we arrived, there were more than sixty Hondurans waiting at the gate for the medical clinic to begin. First though, we needed to take all of the medical supplies off of the bus and into the church where we assembled four medical stations.



A community member receiving treatment



Members of the medical team at the pharmacy station

Each station had a specific purpose. The first station was the Triage which consisted of daily nutritional habits and health history. The second was screening patients' height, weight, waist circumference, temperature, blood pressure, heart rate and blood sugar. Assessment was the third station where patients were diagnosed by nurses, doctors, and premedical students on our medical mission team. The pharmacy was the last station, and consisted of various medications to treat scabies, fungal infections, heartburn, parasites, bacterial infections, and vitamins.

Throughout the nine-day trip, we were able to provide medical aid to 543 patients. Clinics were held on four separate occasions in Empalizada, Potorerillo, Becerra and Trojes.

In both Empalizada and Becerra the team received special thanks from the local villages for conducting the medical clinics. Local mothers within the community cooked all day to provide lunch for our team. Our lunch consisted of the primary daily Honduran meal: beans, rice, and tortillas served with soda and coffee.

On Sunday, February 24th we visited a village that had no running water. Our mission team setup a washing station at a nearby local river, where we washed, combed, and braided the hair of both children and adults. Afterwards, we handed out vital necessities, such as toothbrushes, shampoo, hats, baby supplies, and combs to the locals in the village. The greatest feeling was seeing the smiles on the children's and the adults' faces. As we left, the locals hugged all of us and said "que Dios te bendiga" (God bless you) for helping their local community.

Later that day I and some other team members visited the Juticalpa public hospital. This hospital was unlike any other hospital I have ever seen. When walking the outdoor hallways of the hospital there were many family members waiting to enter into a room as well as stray hungry dogs begging for food from patients that were eating. It had no HIPPA regulation which meant absolutely no privacy for patients. Our group was allowed to walk into any patient's room without their permission. As we were walking through the hospital we passed the labor recovery room and I saw eight patients in one 10x12 foot room with no curtains for privacy. As I was speaking with a surgeon, he informed me that a caesarean section (C-section) cost \$9.00 and any medication cost \$5.00 in American currency. As we passed the pediatrics area of the hospital I noticed that there were no nurses or doctors ever in sight, and the parents would take care of their sick children while at the hospital.

Throughout the trip I was able to touch many Hondurans' lives and I was able to experience firsthand what life is like in Latin America. This experience will forever be with me as it showed me how privileged the American healthcare system is compared to that of Honduras. It was a wake up call about how fortunate we all are as Americans. To Hondurans, just having clean water would be a luxury. I look forward to preparing for the next medical mission trip to Honduras. This experience made me more eager to pursue my career as a medical physician so I can help people in need.

A recognition of thanks to Mary Roy, our leader and commander in chief, the Spanish translators who helped at each medical clinic, and the Olancho Aid Foundation for keeping the New Hampshire Medical Mission Team safe.

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