



Partners In Health of Maine

Compañeros en la Salud de Maine

Volunteers Sharing the Gift of Health
2020 Newsletter

Welcome Back



Hospital personnel meeting us at the airport

It was four years since I had been in Nicaragua so it was a special moment to see my friends meet us at the airport. The majority were doctors and staff from the operating room



My daughter Molly and my son Gregg



Presentation of Dr Kenneth's biography.

"It is an honor for me to present Dr Kenneth Serapio a biography of his life. I have never met a surgeon so patient and kind. This was forever imprinted on my mind one morning when he was scheduled to do surgery at eight one morning. On arriving at the operating room he was told that there would be no sterilized surgical gowns for four hours because of an emergency case at night.

He calmly accepted the news, informed the patients of the delay and sat down on the floor of the operating room, leaned against the cement wall, and took out a book to pass them time.

Why do I share this moment? Many of us are not as patient as we should be, and surgeons are even less fond of delays, often becoming irritable and unkind to others.

Not Kenneth. As you will read in this biography, he has lived an extraordinary lifetime, overcoming one challenge after another through hard work, perseverance, faith, and above all, with grace and kindness.

I am proud to honor such a man, a man who represents the very best of humanity.

Robert Bach



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A book signing sponsored by the Governor and
at the Mayor



Shaquille, a medical student we supported with Dr Peter
Millard

I had the privilege of returning to Nicaragua in March - April of this year for the first time since 1976. I have been a supporter of PIH of Maine for 30 years, and had always wanted to experience the place where Bob Bach, Jill and Ernie Grant, and so many others have dedicated their lives to improving the health of people in Puerto Cabezas and Bilwaskarma. Since I partially retired in January, I finally had the flexibility to go there to explore future opportunities for PIH of Maine and myself personally.

I stayed in "Jill's house," where Harold Oporta and his family live and continue the work of PIH of Maine. Because of the Covid pandemic, I was the first visitor for 3 years, and received a warm welcome from Harold's family, the Greens, Dr. Humberto Olayo, and all the church and community members who know and love Bob, Jill, Ernie, and the rest of the volunteers who have dedicated themselves to service. I was instantly welcomed in the Nancy Bach "Nuevo Amanecer" Hospital by doctors, nurses and staff. I worked on the internal medicine inpatient service for 5 weeks, where I made rounds with the team and coached the medical



A Palliative Care visit by nurse Alice Ramirez
who makes home visits night and day whom we
support with supplies and transportation



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students on basic clinical skills. It is a true teaching hospital with dedicated attending physicians, young doctors doing their 2 years of community service, interns, and medical and nursing students.

Unfortunately, there is no post-graduate training, but the community service doctors function very much like US medical residents, and there is 24 hour on-call service.

My eight years working in Africa prepared me well for the cases I saw in the hospital, and I was pleasantly surprised by the adequacy of medications and medical supplies. The physical structure of the hospital is tired but heroically maintained, and a new, modern hospital under construction outside of the city will open next year, which will finally have a CT scan and other modern diagnostic facilities. It will hopefully have a working bacteriology lab, one of the greatest needs in the current hospital.

The Covid pandemic was under control when I was there, but tuberculosis has made a tragic resurgence. I saw a surprising number of HIV patients in the hospital, due to poor compliance with medication in spite of having a good public health and HIV control program. There continue to be a tragic number of young men who are seriously injured by decompression illness during sea cucumber diving off the coast, many of whom end up paraplegic in spite of treatment in the hospital's hyperbaric chamber. Otherwise, we saw the usual malaria, pneumonia, and many complications from Type 2 diabetes.

The city of Puerto Cabezas is fortunate to have electricity 24/7 and adequate supplies of water. Compared to neighboring countries in Central America, Nicaragua is a bastion of peace with little drug trafficking, no criminal gangs, and much less violence

with a homicide rate of 4.4 per 100,000 in 2020 (compared to 36 in Honduras and 7.5 in the US).

I was delighted to have the opportunity to visit the outlying hospital at Bilwaskarma, where Bob Bach and many volunteers have worked over the years. As a result of upgrading of the hospital in Waspam, the nearest large town, the clinic has become a very effective primary care clinic, which emphasizes prevention through water and sanitation, mosquito nets, and early treatment. I visited the fully-equipped operating room with awe and a certain sadness that time has moved on and surgery is now conducted in Waspam or Puerto Cabezas, but no longer at Bilwaskarma.

As a result of my contacts with the medical students, I was introduced to Dr. Ivania Lopez, the coordinator of the medical school (and Bob's former colleague at Bilwaskarma), and I had a chance to visit the university and attend the epidemiology course. The curriculum is problem-based, and the students actively learn by teaching in small groups. I know PBL well from teaching in Mozambique, and is, I find, much more effective than the boring lectures which we suffered through as medical students. The facility is small and barely adequate, especially since they lost so many teaching aids as a result of Hurricane Eta in 2020. The faculty are dedicated, and barely receive a living wage for their teaching, but are motivated by the desire to create a better future for their city and country.

I am hoping to return to Puerto Cabezas in March-May next year to teach the epidemiology course and to conduct case conferences with the students in the clinical activities. I am looking forward to many challenges and new friendships and experiences.



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Updates from President Jill Grant, 2022

It has been a busy year for the world and for Nicaragua. The COVID epidemic made it difficult for travel. We have been able to keep the important work that we do going. The guest house in Puerto Cabezas house Dr. Peter Millard during his visit. It also welcomed our founder Dr. Robert Bach and two of his children, Molly Marston and Greg Bach. It was a happy visit for Dr. Bach to see his many old and new friends. It has allowed some new projects to be considered.

We Have sent \$2000.00 to help the Clinic in Awas, Honduras, in the Director's name, Ted Anbal River Miller. This will help with some needs where Dr. Kenneth Serapio has retired and still works.

We also sent 700.00 to Alice Ramirez Ellis to buy equipment for her Palliative care visits in Puerto Cabezas. She will buy a Pulse Oximeter, stethoscope, nebulizer and other equipment to help her patients.

We continue to consult with the Bilwaskarma Clinic. They have asked for some help with Equipment and building maintenance.

Finally we will continue to do maintenance on the volunteer house in Puerto Cabezas.

There is much interest in doing medical school scholarships at School of Intercultural Medicine of URACCAN University in Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua. We are investigating the cost per student and an administrative plan.

We continue to pray for the recovery of Dr. Bach. His spirits are good, and he continues to work on his stamina. He will keep Molly, Greg and myself moving along.

Letter from the founder Robert Bach

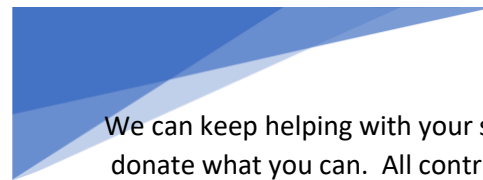
It was wonderful gift that my daughter Molly and son Gregg offered to accompany their Dad on this trip. They were very impressed with the dedication of the care givers and became interested in what way we could Help the most. It became apparent that shipping equipment was no longer necessary since the surgeons were able to buy supplies in Managua with the help of our financial support.

Peter Millard established a connection with the residents and medical students through teaching and working with them. He saw the importance of supporting them, so it was decided t

hat we could develop a scholarship program This would be for the male medical students since one had already been established for the female students. This would entail raising money to support a medical student for five years. We will be working with Ivania Rodriguez at the medical school to develop such a program.

With gratitude to our volunteers and contributors

Robert



We can keep helping with your support. Please donate what you can. All contributions will be helpful. Please send a check or pay by PayPal.

We are **Partners in Health of Maine**
In Paypal. Be sure to use the whole
name with "of Maine"



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Poem read to Kenneth

I remember nights

when I covered your shift.

*The ambulance rushing
through the dark to wake
the doctors and nurses*

*One light after another
appearing in each house.*

*I can still hear the driver
leaning on the horn in my dreams.*

I wonder how you endured.

*I know the nights
and the late phone calls
I know the doubt
that creeps into our hearts
when the urgent call comes.*

*Will I be able
to heal the wounds?*

*Will I be able
to comfort the soul?*

Am I equal to the task?

*Kenneth, you have heard the call
year after year, night after night.*

*The call of the poor
the call of the sick
the call of your people.*

*And you have listened
and you have answered
and you have prayed
and you have touched
each life entrusted to yours.*

*We are from different lands,
and different lives, and yet
the call is the same.*

*And in this work, in this world
you are my true brother.*

Robert Bach, July 2022

Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua