



Partners in Health Of Maine

Compañeros en la Salud

Volunteers sharing the gift of health

January 2012

Our Mission:

Partners in Health of Maine is a group of medical professionals and technical experts who have given their time and expertise to improve the health care in Central America. Since 1976 we have been providing medical care, equipment, education, and technical assistance to the people of this area. Our belief is that caring individuals becoming "Partners in Health" with their third world counterparts can foster long-term improvement.

We would like to dedicate this newsletter to **Paul Currier** and the behind the scenes support of owner **Ray Lynch** of Central Maine Moving and Storage for their support in picking up, packing, and storing crate after crate of medical equipment over the years. A dialogue follows illustrating the unlimited patience of Paul Currier:

Paul Currier's cell phone rings: "Hello -- Is this Paul Currier? Dr Bach said I could drop some things by for Nicaragua."

Paul: "What have you got?"

PIH volunteer: "Some boxes of medical supplies, 5 wheel chairs, and some crutches"

Paul: "No problem--we open at seven."

Paul's secretary: "Good morning Paul. We have a crate here from California which contains a mammogram machine. Do you know anything about it?"

Paul: "Just another one of Dr Bach's surprises. He told me it would be coming last night."

Paul's cell phone: "Hi Paul. This is Ed Bezgembluk. I have an ultrasound machine here. Can I bring it out sometime?"

Paul "No problem- we open at seven"

Paul's cell phone: "Hello Paul--it's Ernie Grant. I have some boxes from St Joesph hospital and Dr. Bach's garage. What's a good time to bring them out"?

Paul: "Anytime after seven."

Paul's secretary: "We have a crate that just arrived from Pennsylvania. Looks like some type of operating room table."

Dear Friends of PIH,

We wish to thank you so very much for your response to our appeal for support for our shipment this past Fall. Because of your generosity we were able to send a 20 thousand lb. shipment of medical supplies and equipment to the North Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. We also appreciate your response to our call for e-mail addresses. We are planning to create a brief bi-monthly e-news and would like to send it to you.



Paul: "Yes just another piece of equipment from Partners in Health. It's an orthopedic fracture table. Have the guys take it out to the warehouse to be packed."

Paul's cell phone: "Hi Paul --This is Jill Grant - I need to put some labels on some of the equipment and boxes

out in your warehouse. Can I come out after work?"

Paul: "No problem-- we'll be waiting for you"

Paul's cell phone: "Hello Paul"?

Paul: "What's up Doc?"

Doc: "I just found out that the X Ray machine that you have already packed and crated won't work because the ceilings down there won't support the overhead suspension part."

Paul: " You're kidding, No?pause...."Okay Doc, I will get the guys to unpack it"

Doc: Thanks Paul, you're a patient man"

If we do not have your email address, you may send it to **Mary Benzigner** at mcbenzigner@gmail.com or include it on the enclosed form with your donation. Saving Maine's tress and postage are high on our list, so if you don't want to receive the paper version of the annual newsletter or any newsletter at all, please inform us on the enclosed form or by an e-mail to **Mary Benzigner**. Many thanks.

A Message from our President, Dr. Robert Bach (bob@pihom.com)

It has been a year of small successes intertwined with the usual expected frustrations for Partners in Health of Maine. **Jill and Ernie Grant** have continued to transform our warehouse/volunteers quarters in Puerto Cabezas into a wonderful place for us to stay, have meetings, seminars, and store medical supplies (including the wheelchairs and water filters that are being distributed to the community). Its original name was "Casa de Amistad" or house of friendship but it is more often referred to as "Casa de Jill."

John Benziger has continued to expand the pathology program in Puerto Cabezas and laboratory programs in other hospitals. He has also introduced the idea of using microwaves for tissue processing which is equally effective but considerably more affordable. He has successfully found a resident pathologist from Leon who is now working full time in Puerto Cabezas. Prior to the era of John all pathology specimens had to be sent across the country to Managua or be brought back to the US in our luggage.

Gina Coppens has continued to support and oversee the distribution of the ceramic water filters that are manufactured in Managua and are sold at cost to pharmacies and families in the community. People are gradually realizing their importance through local education.

Sally Fellers continues to use our warehouse as a distribution center for wheelchairs that are provided by her foundation. These are manufactured in Managua by the handicapped and are shipped to our warehouse following which they are distributed with the help of Harold who lives at "Casa de Amistad."

The **shipment** of approximately thirty thousand pounds left Bangor in November after testing the patience of **Paul Currier** and his boss **Ray Lynch** of Central Maine Moving and Storage for their collection, storage and packing of the shipment. (See separate article of tribute.) The bad news is that since Hurricane Felix the dock at Puerto Cabezas has been in bad condition, unfit for the acceptance of international shipments. Thus our shipment traveled to Rama, a port 150 miles south, and was loaded on a smaller boat to PC. The good news is that the 13 crates have arrived in Bilwi and are now being distributed under the guidance of **Dr Patricia Ballesteros**, our long time representative in Puerto Cabezas.

The **Bilwas outreach program** had their annual meeting in December and I was able to witness its impressive accomplishments. The infant and maternal mortality rates have been reduced to zero secondary to the training and education of health leaders in each of the 9 outlying communities that the Outreach program serves.

During our most recent visit in December we were able to bring two refurbished video scopes which enabled **Dr. Sergio Zartate**, a general surgeon from Leon who volunteers his time, to perform over 25 endoscopies per day. Dr. Zartate travels to Port at least two and sometime three times a year.

Hanna Ekstrom continues to maintain an incredible dental program with an outreach to all the villages around Bilwaskarma. Her efforts have resulted in both preschoolers and students brushing their teeth daily with application of fluoride on a regular basis and most recently examinations and extractions being performed by a new volunteer dentist, **Coleen Scholz**. **Sandy Kozlowsky** has continued to be very active in this project collecting supplies and helping with clinics. Hanna's goal is to set up a fully equipped dental room at the clinic in Bilwaskarma to provide a place for a volunteer dentist to work.

Mary Benziger, with the help of volunteer **Susan Higgins** and Nica friends, painted a colorful mural on the wall of the PT room at the Polyclinic. It was a coral reef scene, as requested by the disabled lobster divers who use the room. She continues to write our newsletter and annual report while my daughter Molly Marston has upgraded our website and has initiated an e-mail mini-news letter that we hope will go out every two months.



It was **Dr Richard Swett's** second trip to Nicaragua this year with the focus of helping Dr Ernesto Espinoza with advanced orthopedic procedures such as arthroscopy. This was a great follow-up in teaching as **Dr John Bergfeld** from the Cleveland Clinic had started teaching the procedure to Ernesto in December. (photo on left shows Dr Richard Swett, orthopedic surgeon from Dover-Foxcroft with **Dr Ernesto Espinoza**, Nicaraguan orthopedic surgeon)

The women's health project will be upgraded with the arrival of two more colposcopes that will give us a total of three. There are two lovely women Nicaraguan gynecologists in Puerto Cabezas who have agreed to perform colposcopy at the Polyclinic and the Women's clinic in addition to those performed by Dr Ballesteros at the hospital. This will increase the availability of this important

procedure to many more patients. We also now have two functioning units to perform "LEEP" procedures, which the two gynecologists have also agreed to perform. **Dr Max Barus** and **Miki McDonald** continue to contribute and oversee this program. Special thanks to **Steve Johnson** for keeping the books and all the numbers straight for all these years

There are many others who have generously contributed with their time and money to whom we are truly grateful. **Don Sleight**, AHS, **Bill Clifford**, AMS, **Robin Frick**, EMMC bioengineering, and **Curt Wright** are just a few.

Many Thanks, Muchas Gracias and Tengki Poli.

Bilwaskarma Village Health Outreach Program

Picture: Mara Shapero, Dr. Paul Shapero, Dr Robert Holmberg



Dr Robert Holmberg from Eastern Maine Medical Center traveled to Nicaragua this December with a Partners in Health of Maine team (**Dr Peter Hauptert, David Hauptert, Andy Herriott, and Dr Bach**) for the 6th annual meeting of the Bilwaskarma Village Health Outreach program.

Bilwas is located in the rural RAAN region of Northeastern Nicaragua along the Rio Coco River on the border with Honduras. This impoverished region with essentially no local economy and subsistence lifestyle includes a population of 12,000 Miskitu Indians living in 9 isolated villages. The Outreach program involves an evidence based method of taking an annual health census in each village by our trained health leader volunteers (Promotores) who work with

the MINSA nurses to determine major health risk trends and corresponding health promotion/ disease prevention strategies in an ongoing annual cycle. The key focus has been maternal child health as the region had some of the highest maternal and child mortality in Nicaragua when we began this project 7 years ago.

We are pleased to announce that as a result of this program: there has been **NO** maternal nor preventable child mortality under age 5 the past 2 years; nearly all children under 2 are fully immunized, and all deliveries were triaged and delivered either by a “Trained Birth Attendant” (Partera) in the huts or local clinics; with higher risk pregnancies delivered in the Bilwaskarma hospital or at the regional obstetrical unit in neighboring Waspm.

Nurses and health leaders from the nine communities participated in the 5th annual meeting this December in Bilwaskarma with the Partners In Health of Maine team. **Dr Holmberg** was quite pleased with the participation and enthusiasm of the nurses and health leaders who performed very clever skits on how to diagnose and treat some basic diseases such as diarrhea, malaria and pneumonia. Such skits are used in village group educational sessions (“charlas”) to effectively demonstrate common preventive health knowledge and practices in key public health topics as sanitation (maintaining and using latrines); safe water (using clay filters, chlorine bleach and maintaining safe wells); importance of prenatal and post natal care; attended deliveries, infant nutrition (breast feeding); oral health (new campaign in all villages this past year led by PIH of Maine volunteer **Dr Hannah Eckstrom**); and treatment of child diarrhea and pneumonia.

It was interesting for me to learn that this program works on a census based interactive method whereby the number of people in each house, number of cases of the most common diseases, and the infant and maternal mortality are all documented. These statistics are then reviewed with the goal of prevention, earlier diagnosis, and treatment that is effective but not beyond their capability. I was very impressed by what I witnessed at these meetings where health leaders and nurses demonstrated a genuine enthusiasm their accomplishments.

Our Bilwaskarma Partners in Health team is determined, with your good help, to secure further funding for this vital preventive health program. **Dr Peter Hauptert, Bob Holmberg, and Jill Grant** will be writing for further grant support besides appealing herein to your most appreciated donations.

Nicaraguan Medical School Scholarship Fund:

We are currently helping three Nicaraguan medical students with the costs of medical school. Two are attending medical school in Managua and the other is attending the new medical school in Puerto Cabezas.

Mammography Project,

In December we were privileged to be accompanied by **Dr James Branscomb**, who is a radiologist with a particular interest and expertise in mammography. We were in hopes of performing mammography as there was a mammogram unit at the hospital. Unfortunately the machine was too old to perform the task and Dr Branscomb performed breast ultrasounds instead. After returning home he was able to find a later model mammography unit in addition to one that was donated from Central Maine Imaging Center in Lewiston. Both were included in the shipment along with a developer, donated from the Breast Center at Eastern Maine Medical Center. **James Remachadis**, a bioengineer, knowledgeable in X Ray, has already checked the equipment and plans to set up the equipment when he joins the team in April. **Sharron Dow**, a very experienced technician in mammography from EMMC, will also be part of the team and direct her efforts training a local technician in Puerto Cabezas.

In order to get this project underway we need to build an addition to the X Ray Department to accommodate the new mammogram units and provide a place for privacy to perform the exams. We are in hopes that we will receive enough contributions from our annual appeal to start construction as soon as possible, so it is completed before our team arrives in April. The estimated cost is \$8,000.

Gratitude

*In the early dawn I see an old man pulling
a wooden cart
All his freshly made bread ready for
a predawn start*

*Then a woman passes by carrying bananas
on her back
Followed by another carrying rice in
a large burlap sack*

*A family takes turns pounding rice
next door
While two children pick over beans on
the porch floor*

*A bicycle carrying a father, mother, and child
goes by
An old truck passes billowing black smoke
in the sky*

*The hardship of life is reflected in
worn looking faces
Bent over backs and limping gaits in
need of braces*

*At night a single candle casts a shadow
from a window sill
Of a woman with a water bucket on her head
walking up the hill*

*And yet there is no lack of laughter, joy
and giving
Despite the many hardships of daily
living*

*Their ability to cope and be thankful
transcends reason
It was a blessing to witness this during
this special season*

by Bob Bach, December, 2011, Nicaragua

Website

Please visit our website at www.pihom.com. Molly Marston has revamped and done a great job of providing easily accessible information. Learn more about our history, mission and accomplishments, and see back issues of our newsletter when you visit our website.

Annual Appeal

Your donation to our annual appeal may be earmarked for specific projects such as **construction of the mammography suite, the Bilwaskarma village outreach program, the Nicaraguan Medical School scholarship fund, the shipping and equipment fund**, or other projects mentioned on our website, by indicating it on your check. Please make your check payable to *Partners in Health* and send it in the enclosed envelope with the form provided. Your donation is tax deductible. Thank you so much for your generosity. Muchas gracias