



Partners In Health Newsletter

Volunteers sharing the gift of Health!

December 2002

Construction of operating room in Bilwaskarma clinic discontinued because of lack of funds:

April Trip

by Dr. Robert Bach (mc.bach@verizon.net)

Our time in Bilwaskarma was very exciting as we were able to start the foundation for the new wing for the clinic. A great deal of the work was accomplished by our team that included several young enthusiastic people ∴ Seth Gabarro, Manuel Blanc, Devon Brooks, and Adam Bezbembuk. The older generation also participated in digging and laying blocks which included Ralph Gabarro CEO of Mayo Regional Hosp. Ed Bezbembuk an ultrasound technician from Bangor spent many hours teaching and performing ultrasounds while John Bozin of the engineering department of Mayo Regional Hospital was able to repair a lot of equipment. Several surgeries were also performed with anesthesia being tirelessly and skillfully provided by Karen Brookss, nurse anesthetist from Mayo Regional Hosp.

The new wing will house a new stationary X Ray machine and an operating room. Currently there is a portable X Ray machine in one of the consultation rooms and a makeshift small operating room in another consultation room. The operating room has proved to be inadequate because of its small size. Further more the clinic presently has only one consultation room and is in need of the two that are currently unavailable so that when visiting teams come doctors and nurses will be able to work simultaneously.

At present the construction has been discontinued because of lack of funds so we are hoping that his newsletter will generate some funds to continue this project...

Our days in Puerto-Cabezas were saddened by the absence of "Miss Judy" who died this past winter. We still stayed at her house but it just was not the same. Our team performed and assisted with several surgeries while Dr. Templeton and Ed B. performed

and taught the art of ultrasound to local physicians. Dr Templeton also gave some very good lectures to the physicians that were very well received. The youthful ranks of our team not only assisted with some of the surgeries but also unpacked two 40 ft containers that arrived several days prior to our arrival.

We also spent a day in Managua at the Lenin Fonseca Hosp, the major teaching hospital in Managua where we reviewed some difficult cases and presented lectures on thoracic trauma and empyemas. We sent a container to this hosp. as well containing beds and equipment for the surgical service including an anesthesia machine.

We still have 25 beds at Fox and Ginn that are waiting to be shipped when we have adequate funds

The trip, as with every trip to Nicaragua, was a combination of experiences and emotions. The new volunteers along with the experienced, were an inspiration. With the help of our volunteers and donors this important work will continue.



**Ralph Gabarro, Seth Gabarro, and Manuel
LeBlanc making cement blocks
for the new operating room.**

"Cuando va a regresar?" These are words that always greet us every visit to Nicaragua. They mean "When will you return?" When ever we question if all the hard work is worth it, we think of these words and know we make a difference.

By Gail Bach

Burn Unit for Hospital in Puerto Cabezas

Joan MacCracken, MD

A very energetic surgeon, Dr. Patricia Sarmiento, this March in Puerto Cabezas presented her dream of a burn room for the hospital. She had written up an elegant proposal detailing the need for a sterile, isolated environment for burn victims. With this burn "unit" the hospital could successfully help more burn patients and improve their care by decreasing infections and hospital stay. Many patients are sent to Managua, a long way from home.

What struck me as amazing was the limited cost of such a project. She estimated it could be built for \$8900.00. Upon my return to the United States, I decided to take on this project and raise the funds. With my Christmas card list in hand, I sent to ninety friends a request for donations for this worthy cause and asked for \$100 from each or whatever they could give.

The response was overwhelming. Perhaps, because it was such a reachable, modest, and immediate goal, my friends were pleased to help. Several gave even more than requested. In the end we raised \$9500. Construction bids are being obtained and the unit will soon become a reality. It started as a dream by a dedicated surgeon who saw a need and it mushroomed into a possibility by generous contributions from strangers who were willing and grateful to help.

There are many needs at the hospital in Puerto Cabezas. The burn patients will need to have specific laboratory tests to properly follow their progress. Some simple but necessary laboratory equipment would make a big difference. What I have learned from my fund raising efforts is that many folks are willing to help, they just need to be asked and understand how their dollars can make a difference.



Partners In Health of Maine goes online!

Partners In Health is pleased to announce that we now have a Web site. Molly Marston has donated her time and expertise to design our web site. The web site will contain outlines and updates of our ongoing projects, photographs of Nicaragua and Guatemala, information about the countries we are working in, needs lists, and new volunteer information.

This site will be undated as new projects are started and new shipments are sent. Volunteers who have made their first trip and volunteers who have made many trips will write about their experiences and adventures. You will learn about the impact of our work and the value of the donations we receive.

We are very excited to have this state of the art way of communicating with our supporters. We hope you visit our site soon at:

PIHOM.com



Wish List

If anyone has an old stethoscope or BP cuff around the house or work, it would be greatly appreciated by the people we help in Nicaragua. Put it in a box and mail it to : Jill Grant,
150 State Street, Brewer, Maine
04412

CAMP CHRYSALIS NICARAGUA CONNECTION

By Miki McDonald NP
(miki.macdonald@maine.edu)

Children making jewelry out of clay, adults stuffing dolls with love and creativity; lots of love inspired by the Camp Chrysalis Community to reach out to people affected by HIV/AIDS in Nicaragua.

Camp Chrysalis is a camp which meets yearly on a lake in Maine, bringing together families affected by HIV/AIDS. As part of its mission statement - connecting with people in other countries affected by AIDS - Nicaragua was an obvious choice given that many members of the Chrysalis Community have traveled to Nicaragua with Partners in Health.

Last summer with the craft sale and donations from camp members, campers raised over \$2,000 to help Fundacion Nimehuatzim, a community based AIDS prevention organization in Nicaragua.



NURSING FUND UPDATE

By Miki McDonald NP
(miki.macdonald@maine.edu)

The Partners in Health (PIH) Nursing Fund was created in 1998 to help promote nursing education and quality care for nurses in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua. We have been providing food for nursing students boarding at the local nursing

school in Puerto Cabezas since 1999. Many students come from distant communities and would be unable to continue their studies due to lack of nourishment. Prior to the Nursing Fund's support, many students returned to their villages due to hunger.

In collaboration with the Nursing Fund, the Nursing Association of Puerto Cabezas has dedicated three workshops a year for further training on HIV/AIDS due to the growing number of cases of people with AIDS in the region. Nurses have reported an increase in their comfort level in caring for people with HIV.

This past March, our PIH group did a mini-fund raiser and we were able to purchase three mountain bikes for nurses working in Lamlaya, Kamla, and el Muelle, three communities which are not easily accessible by public transportation.

Last year three nurses from Puerto Cabezas were able to attend the National Nurses Association Convention in Managua, similar to our American Nurses Association (ANA) Convention in Washington DC. We hope to continue to provide support for nurses to attend the national conference in order to improve representation of nurses from the Atlantic Coast with the national organization.

The Nursing Fund is grateful to many generous contributors, especially Donald and Jean Macdonald from San Diego, California whose support enables us to offer the local nursing school a three year commitment in providing food for its residents. We send the gratitude from the students and the Nurses Association of Puerto Cabezas.

For further information on the PIH Nursing Fund, please call Miki Macdonald @ 207-947-2413 or email @ miki.macdonald@maine.edu.

.PAP PROJECT: Sitting on the Stool

By Miki McDonald NP
(miki.macdonald@maine.edu)

Our group spent two weeks in March 2002 in Puerto Cabezas and surrounding villages providing cervical cancer screening to over 400 women. The PAP Project began in 1999 when Laurie Eddy, FNP from Penquis Cap in Bangor decided to make her Masters in Nursing Project a Cervical and Breast Cancer screening project in the Puerto Cabezas area after a request from Erna Patterson, RN from Puerto Cabezas requested we do PAPs for women in remote villages who had no access to screening. The project began with screening women in Tuapi and Krukira and has now expanded to Kamla, Lamlaya and Puerto Cabezas.

The surprising twist in the past two years has been the amount of women in the city of Puerto Cabezas who have come forward requesting PAP smears. Originally we had to convince women of the importance of cervical cancer screening, but now the word has spread like a forest fire and up to a hundred women a day appeared at the small door to the clinic in Puerto Cabezas demanding PAP smears.

We have been told by our local partners in the project that women appear when North Americans arrive because they feel more secure that the results of the PAPs will return to them. There has been an ongoing problem in the region with no cytologist present to read the PAPs. The PAPs done by the nurses at the health center have been sent to Managua, and often results do not return, leaving patients without trust for the local system. The PIH PAP Project goal is to have a local cytologist within the next year. We are working with the Ministry of Health to help reach this goal.

At this time PAPs done by PIH have been read by a pathologist in Matagalpa, Nicaragua for \$3 a PAP, a connection made in collaboration with Dorothy Granada, RN working in Mulukuku,

Nicaragua. Other PAPs have been read for free

by cytologists at Dahl-Chase Laboratory in Bangor and cytologists in Lewiston.

The PIH group in March consisted of a group of Maine nurses: Tiffany Duffy, RN, Rachel Taylor, RN, Marge Knuuti, RN, and Miki Macdonald, NP. Fred Nichols, currently a medical student at University of New England, quickly became an expert in doing gynecological examinations. Vital distractions were provided by our beloved pediatrician, Joan MacCracken, MD who managed to distract troops of children who ordinarily impede progress by peeping in windows as we perform PAP smears.

Rachel Taylor, RN took the opportunity to teach breast self examination to women waiting for PAP smears. She had brought a breast model which enabled women to feel different types of breast lumps. The breast model and a training manual were donated to the local Women's Movement.

Max Barus, MD from Lewiston has been working on grants to help support a cytologist dedicated to reading PAP smears for the region. Local gynecologist, Wilfred Cunningham, MD has agreed to care for women with abnormal PAPs. Referrals are made by the nurses at the local health center when abnormal PAP smears are detected.

We have learned a lot from "walking in the moccasins" or in this case, sitting on the stool of the local nurses who usually perform PAP smears for women of the region. The main insight into their work is the frustration of trying to provide quality care with limited supplies (slides, cytology brushes, fixative, gloves) and most importantly the assurance that the PAP smears will be read by a qualified technician and results will return to the women in a timely manner.

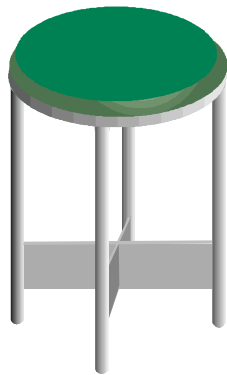
Sitting on the stool in a hot and humid room without a fan, with electricity going off sporadically and running out of gloves with

(Sitting on a Stool continued)

Clayda Rivas Pont, RN. She is jovial Nicaraguan nurse whose job it is to sit on the same stool day after day and attempt to provide quality care without knowing if the cells she collects for PAPs will ever be read. Clayda has given us an awareness of the level of commitment the local health care providers have in trying to serve the community with so very little. Volunteering with PIH is an experience in bearing witness to the work done by local health care providers, be they nurses, doctors, lab technicians, hospital cooks or janitors. Once we engage in doing the work of any one of these people, we quickly recognize how amazing they are in keeping the faith, that given such scant resources they can still make a difference in the health of the people they serve.

Often we are asked what is it like to do the work we do in Nicaragua, and honestly I can think of one word to describe it: fun. It's fun because despite to poverty, people are grateful for what we have to offer and they most often have a sense of humor which transcends language and culture.

For further information on the Nicaraguan PAP Project please contact Max Barus, MD @ 207-989-1337 or email at mbarus@ctel.net or miki.macdonald@maine.edu



Future Nicaraguan major leaguers.



A Win/Win situation

. Joan MacCracken, MD

In March 2002 I accompanied a healthcare team led by Miki MacDonald, RN, NP to Puerto Cabezas. The primary project was women's health and extending the availability of Pap smears for women of the region. Miki assigned me, a pediatrician, the task of keeping the curious children away from the clinic procedure room so that the women could have privacy during the examinations. This was a wonderful job for a veteran camp counselor. Though I visited the Nancy Bach New Dawn hospital and toured the nursery and pediatric wards, I particularly enjoyed interacting with the village children. We tossed a ball around, played with my monkey puppet, taught each other words (these children speak Miskito) and sang songs. At one point fifty-seven children learned to sing Zippidy DooDah. But best of all were their smiling faces as they repeated their newly learned phrase, "Niztoomeetchew."

The people of this eastern Nicaraguan region are extremely friendly

and the children, curious and bright. Despite facing war, poverty, and very few possessions, these folks radiate a spirit and pride for their culture and land. They emit a serenity and happiness that many with “much more” may never obtain.

Partners in Health gives us a unique opportunity to give and receive. We have much to offer, but perhaps much more to learn. It is a win/win situation.

October Trip – Plans for the Future
By Jill Grant (jgrant6198@aol.com)

On October 26 the first of a part of a ten person team, arrived in Managua, Nicaragua. Two days later we all traveled to Bilwaskarma on a small plane. In our group were a retired general surgeon, Dr. Peter Hauptert, a retired USAID administrator, Andre Herriott, a pediatric surgeon, Dr. Alan Browne, a surgical nurse, Nancy Tkacz RN, a pediatric endocrinologist, Dr. Joan McCracken, a pediatrician, Dr. Robert Holmberg, a family practitioner, Dr. Max Barus, a pre med student, Eben Barus, a medical technologist, Jill Grant MT (ASCP), and an eighteen year old, Nathan Grant. This diverse and interesting group, managed to evaluate the present situation and project a plan for the future of the polyclinic of Bilwaskarma. The most remarkable part of the visit was the cooperation and sharing between the members of the group.

We had a very productive meeting with the new Minister of Health and an old friend Dr. Florence Levy. Dr. Levy was able to outline the Nicaraguan government’s plans for the future development of the Bilwaskarma area. There will be help in paying for additional personnel for an expanded outreach program to promote preventive health care in the nearby nine villages. This is a high priority project with Partners in Health. Extra money will be needed to support this project to maintain transportation so the outreach programs can be supervised and supported. Five thousand dollars will be needed to support the transportation part of the outreach program for two years.

When asked about the future of surgery being done in the Bilwas/ Waspam area, Dr. Levy stated that it will be at least five to ten years in the future before local resources will support surgery in the Bilwaskarma / Waspam area... It became clear to Partners in Health that we must continue with the expansion of the OR space in Bilwaskarma and arrange for more OR teams to visit on a regular basis. To complete the new OR space will take about ten thousand dollars.

Our team spent two days in Bilwas. For many it was the first visit to the peaceful village. As we departed for Puerto Cabezas, we all had many ideas on how to continue the important work in Bilwaskarma. We arrived in Puerto Cabezas on October 31. It is a trip from an agrarian society to the more modern familiar town. The hospital in Puerto Cabezas has seen progress since our last visit. The new decompression chamber is now in operation to help the lobster divers. The last materials from the March shipment were distributed. As always, the materials from the shipments are greeted eagerly and put into use rapidly. Each year we need ten thousand dollars to ship the much needed equipment and medical supplies that hospitals in the US generously donate to Partners in Health.

On Saturday Nov. 2 four of our team traveled to the mining area by small plane and landed in a cow pasture. We were greeted by the Director of the hospital in Rosita. Dr. Alan Browne and Nancy Tkacz RN were guided through the hospital in Rosita by the hospital Director and assessed the OR suite. They were impressed by the staff and the level of care given in a very run down building with few medical supplies. We ate supper with the medical staff of the hospital. The next morning we traveled by the Rosita Hospital pickup to Bonanza Hospital. Bonanza has a brand new hospital with a very adequate OR Space. They have no OR equipment of any kind. Alan and Nancy are compiling a list of the needs.

We returned to Puerto Cabezas on Monday Nov 4. We visited the new guest house that is near completion. This will be living quarters for visiting teams and it will have storage space for our shipments. Training work shops are located on the first floor to teach the maintenance and repair of hospital equipment. We will need between five to ten thousand dollars for the completion of this project.

As the members of our team left Puerto Cabezas for the return trip home, each person had a better prospective about their life of abundance in the United States. All these diverse people are joined in a hope to help the precious Nicaraguan people they met