

Brigades, Brigades, and More Brigades



BROWN



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Sometime in November we started getting quite worried. It seemed like every email we opened up someone else was asking to schedule a brigade experience in February. We asked people whether they wouldn't consider coming in January or perhaps later. But everyone seemed to think that February was the flavor of the ---- - oh well, you get the idea. The calendar started to fill up with all sorts of strange intersecting lines. I think we actually used up our color choices. We had to attempt to arrange arrivals and departures according to when we could have transportation at the airport. A typical conversation in February went something like this. "Oh my God, I got five people from Brown leaving, and fifteen people from VCU coming this afternoon, but I have to remember to return for the eighteen that are coming in tomorrow." Somehow or another we got through it, and all seven brigade teams had incredible experiences.

We were a bit more concerned because we had our first ever surgical brigade from Unidad Hospitalaria Móvil in Latino America (UHMLA) coming in February. Under the best of circumstances we weren't sure we could pull this off, but coming in February at the same time as two other brigades, we were trembling in our boots. But Dr. Rolando Rolandelli and his surgical team performed sixty-two procedures. We got them their patients, coordinated with the hospital, and provided all the personal and professional support they would need. No one was any the wiser that we were terrified we wouldn't pull it off. The best news, most of those sixty-two patients had absolutely no hope of having their procedures and relieving them their pain prior to UHMLA coming.



Tickling on the UHMLA surgery brigade

But wait, there's more... Dr. Emily Harrison, Brown University, and Wingate University were in Guachipilincito for three weeks. They rotated people in an out over the course of the three weeks. They took shifts at the emergency clinic in Concepcion and sent students down to the Town's Health Center. They provided workshops and professional sharings with our Honduran medical staff. Dr. Hojman, child psychologist, saw children in Concepcion and Santa Lucia who

have been challenged with mental health issues. Additionally, he spoke extensively with our medical professionals as to how they could best approach and offer some treatment for persons with mental health concerns. The students took a health census in the community of Guachipilincito and the surrounding areas. But wait, there's more... Virginia Commonwealth University and Fairfax Family Practice Centers were at their clinic in Pinares hiking into the mountains to visit the smaller communities where health care is scarce. But wait, there's more... It would be easy to forget about the smaller brigades because they certainly did not get the attention that the others received. John Hopkins really considered their brigade a visit, but the three individuals were busy and traveling every day. MAHEC were five people in Camasca. They spent their time working at the health center and 15 year old Henry spent his days volunteering at the school. Dental with two dentists and two assistants saw lots of patients, and as importantly, supported our dentists in Concepcion and Santa Lucia in developing their ongoing practices.



Brown/Wingate Breakfast at Guachipilincito

But wait there's more... Cleveland Clinic under the leadership of Dr. Brent Burkey, Christ Church, and their guest students in pharmacology from the University of Michigan, 34 people strong, became a powerful presence for transformation in the town of Camasca toward the end of the month. They invested the town with an amazing spirit of joy and celebration. The testament of their visit is the painted mural at the sport's complex in the center of town. And that was February. But wait, there's more... March featured the arrival of Dr. Marti Kubik and the nursing brigade from the University of Minnesota. During Holy Week of the same Month, the University of Wyoming with Linda Johnson, NP, visited the clinic they built in Agua Salada. April has already seen the University of Buffalo School of Medicine, a first time brigade that held field clinics around the town of Santa Lucia. Finally at the end of this month, Maine-Dartmouth will return at the end of the month to visit Colomoncagua for their second consecutive year.

But wait, there's more... No, not really, that's it. Sometimes people ask me whether all these brigades are all that effective. Are we doing any good, or are we simply making people dependent on charity? Aren't these just band aid measures? I respond by saying that sometimes people desperately need band aids to stop the bleeding. I have witnessed instances where the intervention of a brigade actually was lifesaving. As to whether we are making people dependent on charity, the brigade services are coordinated with our regular ongoing health care measures. We follow up. We encourage and partner with our local communities such that the exceptional service of a brigade is part of the ongoing mission of sustainable development.



Caring

It is easy to be incredibly impressed with the sheer volume of the work of our brigades, and certainly we are proud to have hosted such successful interventions. But it would be a mistake to simply look at that. What is actually more impressive is the sense of goodwill and synergy of relationships that have been spawned in the groups' visits. This goes on. We see it as a transformative energy giving shape to sustainable development, moving persons and people from the oppression of poverty to a new day of hope and justice.