

Quantity Vs. Quality

Wyoming University has been coming to the small village of Agua Salada for many years. They built the clinic there and have developed a very rich and meaningful relationship with the local people. Generally they see a great many people while they are here, sometimes as many as 100 a day. The service that they offer is stellar. They are busy from start to finish with little time to relax or reflect.



They were in Agua Salada this past Holy Week. This brigade did not unfold in the same way as past brigades. In deference to Lemony Snicket and Jim Carrey, we experienced a series of unfortunate incidents. Shoulder to Shoulder was a bit taxed this year with eight groups arriving in the month of February. This was an all-hands-on-deck experience. Whereas, we were often very challenged, stretched, and stressed, we managed without making any major mistakes. However, we did not follow-up to insure that the promotion of the Wyoming brigade had taken place in Agua Salada. It was also Holy Week. Everyone, including our staff, has Holy Week off. So Wyoming had a very slow start and they did not see the tremendous numbers of people that they had in past visits.



We were very apologetic, and because we have a long-standing, fruitful relationship with Wyoming, they were very graceful and forgiving in their response. Also, because it was Holy Week, Laura and I had more time to be present to the brigade. We were able to spend almost the entire day with them on Thursday. They were seeing patients, perhaps less than on previous brigades, but they were busy. The mood was light while we were there, everyone seemed grateful for the opportunity to be there. On this particular day, the brigade welcomed the parteras (midwives) for an appreciation lunch. The oldest midwife from the community was present. Her sense of joy in being received by the brigade was extremely moving. Later in the day, we sat down to a meeting with the local health committee, and the Shoulder to Shoulder health promoter and nurse for the area. In the meeting that sense of mutual respect and appreciation seemed to deepen. The sharing in terms of what Wyoming could do to foster the ongoing health work within the community deepened an already secure relationship. I'm not

certain, but I was beginning to have the feeling that the brigade's less hectic experience was forging something even greater. Wyoming will be back in November and they will see a lot of patients again. They will return, perhaps, with even a greater appreciation for the value of the relationships they built and sustain. It only takes money to build a clinic. It only takes medical professionals and supplies to offer medical care. It takes so much more to fully invest oneself into the lives and world of others. Perhaps the series of unfortunate events had a fateful purpose.



Laura and I also traveled with the Wyoming brigade to Tegucigalpa for their flight out. On the night before their flight, we sat down to share in reflection on the participants' experiences. Gratitude was a major theme; gratitude for the time and space to come to know the people of Agua Salada. The other theme present was the feeling that everyone had offered quality health care. I understood this as meaning that the service was offered with integrity and compassion.



I suspect that Wyoming brings their medical students to Honduras and Agua Salada in order to equip them with a Global Health Care experience. But this is not a box to be checked off on your resume of life. It is not accomplished by simply being there and doing the expected work. The satisfaction of coming to know another person from another culture in a foreign environment requires the willingness to give time, space, and respect. Wyoming sees a great many patients, but the real value they offer is in the quality of these encounters, and not their quantity.

Linda Johnson, NP, the leader of the University of Wyoming brigade experience in Agua Salada, has just been recognized by the university in the reception of the Faculty Award for Internationalization. Congratulations Linda!! Read about it at <http://www.uwyo.edu/uw/news/2016/04/uws-linda-johnson-honored-for-work-in-honduras.html>.