

Largest Hospital Mission Brigade Sees Record



A team of 64 physicians, nurses, physician assistants, physical therapists, and other support personnel from Virginia Hospital Center completed a week-long mission to Honduras November 5-12, 2005. Family Practice Chair Barry Byer, MD, who has organized the brigade since its inception, calls the group "the largest and strongest we've ever had."

"We had the largest primary care team, a very strong pharmacy team of seven, and the most eye care professionals, including an ophthalmologist and three board-certified opticians," reported Dr. Byer. "The surgical team included one general surgeon, two plastic surgeons, and two OB/GYNs. We had an anesthesia team of four, a five-person physical therapy team, and a dozen OR and recovery room nurses."

Over the course of five days (the first day and a half in country was spent setting up), the team treated nearly 8,200 people, compared to 6,500 patients last year. "That includes over 8,100 primary and eye care patients, as well as 89 surgical patients," says Dr. Byer, noting that 15 to 20 more surgical patients had been seen than in any previous year.

Along with the most team members to date, the brigade also brought along the most medical supplies. In past years, they shipped one 40-foot container of supplies; this year, an additional full 20-foot container and one partially-filled 20-foot container were added.

"We've been more effective than ever in getting the pharmaceuticals we need, which can change everything for these patients—not just to shorten the course of an illness, but make it less likely that it doesn't become a chronic condition,"

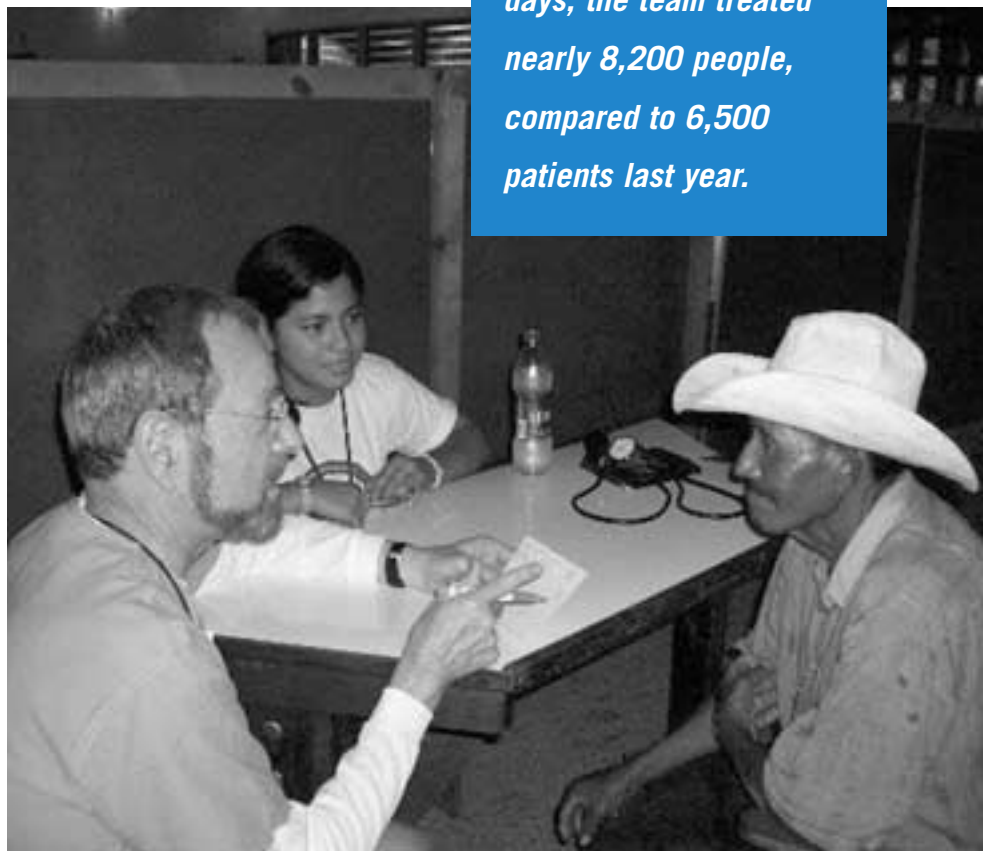
says Dr. Byer. In previous years, the team has been able to bring no more than two or three wheelchairs to distribute; this year, they were loaded down with 30. "Wheelchairs, crutches or walkers can give someone a whole new life down there."

In a departure from previous brigades, when the group has traveled from town to town each day to set up primary care clinics, the team spent three full days based in a town new to the team, called Comayagua. On the other two days, they traveled to isolated rural areas some 20 miles from Comayagua.

"We saw some people who almost never see a doctor, and when they do, the doctors don't have much to give them: people with horrible skin infections, severe gastric problems, and terrible respiratory problems such as severe asthma and pneumonia," says Dr. Byer.

Numbers in Honduras

Over the course of five days, the team treated nearly 8,200 people, compared to 6,500 patients last year.



"We saw some people we could help and others who just made us very sad because they hadn't been treated in time, and we couldn't do anything for them." Among those sad cases: two children with congenital hypothyroidism. "I'd read about this condition in textbooks, but had never seen a case before. And here we had two. When this condition goes untreated, the child becomes mentally retarded and develops very flaccid muscles and hypermobile joints. There was nothing we could do because we saw these children too late; in this country, that would never happen."

Meanwhile, the surgical team set up at Comayagua's Hospital Santa Teresa for the full five days, performing plastic surgeries, burn care, gynecological surgeries, breast and skin cancer surgeries, and several caesarean sections for women with complicated pregnancies.

One Hospital physician was so determined to return with the brigade that he insisted on getting clearance to travel from his own physician before undergoing gall bladder surgery the week before the trip. "In my upbringing in India, I saw so many poor people who didn't have access to medical care, and I always tend to feel for those people who can't get medical help," says ophthalmologist Suresh Limaye, MD.

Eye care is a growing part of the team's mission, says Dr. Limaye. Because many Hondurans work in poor and unhygienic conditions, eye infections are frequent and may go undiagnosed and untreated for a long period of time. "With these external deficits, affecting the lid, cornea, and conjunctiva, we see the patients at a much more serious stage of the disease," he says.

Untreated glaucoma is also common among the patients treated in Honduras. And some patients simply never knew how bad their vision was until they received an eye exam. "They didn't have glasses—glasses are a luxury. The world they were seeing, that was so limited, they thought that was how everyone saw," says Dr. Limaye. "When they put on prescription glasses, their faces just light up."

"It's so rewarding and satisfying when you can make a difference like that in people's lives," says Dr. Byer. "It's an awesome experience, and that's why the team sacrifices so much to go down there, going back year after year." ♦

The 2005 Medical Brigade to Honduras was the largest in its six-year history.

Jan/Feb/Mar SCHEDULE 2006

Jan

DATE	MEETING	TIME	LOCATION
Jan 9	Credentials Committee	6:00 – 8:00 pm	Board Room
Jan 10	Dept of Pediatrics M&M Review	8:00 – 9:00 am 12:30 – 1:30 pm	A,B B
Jan 11	QEC Orthopedic Grand Rounds Cardiology Conference	7:30 – 8:30 am 7:30 – 8:30 am 12:30 – 1:30 pm	Board Room B,C A
Jan 12	Cancer Conference	12:00 – 1:30 pm	A,B,C
Jan 13	Medical Grand Rounds	12:15 – 1:30 pm	A,B
Jan 17	Dept of Pediatrics	8:00 – 9:00 am	A,B
Jan 18	Orthopedic Grand Rounds	7:30 – 8:30 am	B,C
Jan 19	Cancer Conference	12:00 – 1:30 pm	A,B,C
Jan 20	Medical Grand Rounds	12:15 – 1:30 pm	A,B
Jan 23	Patient Care Monitoring Medical Executive Committee	12:30 – 1:30 pm 6:00 – 7:00 pm	A A
Jan 24	Dept of Pediatrics Department of Ob/Gyn	8:00 – 9:00 am 12:00 – 1:00 pm	A,B A,B
Jan 25	Orthopedic Grand Rounds Clinical Risk Management	7:30 – 8:30 am 12:30 – 1:30 pm	B,C Board Room
Jan 26	Cancer Conference	12:00 – 1:30 pm	A,B,C
Jan 27	Medical Grand Rounds	12:15 – 1:30 pm	A,B
Jan 31	Dept of Pediatrics	8:00 – 9:00 am	A,B

Feb

Feb 1	Orthopedic Grand Rounds	7:30 – 8:30 am	B,C
Feb 2	Cancer Conference	12:00 – 1:30 pm	A,B,C
Feb 3	Medical Grand Rounds	12:15 – 1:30 pm	A,B
Feb 6	Credentials Committee	6:00 – 8:00 pm	Board Room
Feb 7	Dept of Pediatrics	8:00 – 9:00 am	A,B
Feb 8	QEC Orthopedic Grand Rounds Infection Control Cardiology Conference	7:30 – 8:30 am 7:30 – 8:30 am 12:00 – 1:30 pm 12:30 – 1:30 pm	Board Room B,C TBA A
Feb 9	Cancer Conference	12:00 – 1:30 pm	A,B,C
Feb 10	Medical Grand Rounds	12:15 – 1:30 pm	A,B
Feb 14	Dept of Pediatrics M&M Review Committee	8:00 – 9:00 am 12:30 – 1:30 pm	A,B B
Feb 15	Orthopedic Grand Rounds	7:30 – 8:30 am	B,C
Feb 16	Cancer Conference	12:00 – 1:30 pm	A,B,C