

## Honduras Trip Report – May 2019

Department of Family Medicine, University of Rochester

<b>Participants</b>	
<u>Faculty</u> Ryan Cummings Douglas Stockman	<u>Residents</u> Alissa Correll Matt Rivera
<u>Interpreters</u> Diego, Yovanni, Melissa, Paulet	<u>Other Residents</u> Samantha Kamp
<u>Dental</u> Edith Gonzalez Mary Nikikova Lina Vega	<u>Unitarian Church</u> Paul Suwijn

### Introduction

The Department of Family Medicine at the University of Rochester operates a Global Health Program. This year-round program offers didactic training throughout the year and travels twice a year for two weeks at a time to rural Honduras. The Department has partnered with a rural community called San Jose, San Marcos de la Sierra in the Southwestern state of Intibuca, Honduras. The needs of the target community are great and go beyond curative medicine. By listening to the concerns of the local community members and performing qualitative community assessment, we are creating interventions designed to address the common problems. Below is a report from our May 2019 trip.

### Travel and General Comments

The trip to Honduras was uneventful. No bags, or people, were left behind. We again enjoyed the excellent cooking of Reina. She has stepped in fully to take the place of her deceased mother, our former cook. The group stayed remarkably healthy from a GI perspective. There is no water in San Jose so we were a bit sad to realize there was no water in our 4,000 gallon water tank. The first few days in San Jose there was no rain so Doug had to scramble to purchase water from outside the area and have 1,000 gallons delivered via truck over 3 days. As luck would have it, rain started falling shortly after the water was delivered. Using gutters we collected enough water for the rest of the trip.

Another shocking thing we realized as we pulled into San Jose on the first day is that much of the surrounding countryside was burned by a wildfire. The villagers reported that a few weeks ago two separate fires had started in the area and scorched large swaths of San Jose. We were fortunate to not lose our volunteer house, given the fire burned right up to and around the house.

### Education & Schools

#### Scholarships

On “SCHOLARSHIP SATURDAY”, all available hands participated, resulting in a remarkably smooth check-in and distribution process. Paul had time to engage in brief conversation with each family when presenting them with their second monetary installment. Of the 38 original 2019 scholarship recipients, we learned that 2 students had left



school this spring, to take their chance at reaching the U.S.. We received no grade report or paperwork from Osman Rene Pineda, 7th grader from El Horno. Delmi Jackeline Gutierrez Pineda is in the process of transferring from 10th grade in La Esperanza to San Marcos. Her scholarship was put in escrow with Roney, pending successful acceptance at San Marcos, and receipt of an acceptable grade report from La Esperanza.

### Changes in the school policy in the San Marcos high school

Director Eliud Arauz Pereira instituted a new policy for students in Grades 10-11 which stipulates that two failing subjects at the end of Q2 means they will not be permitted to continue into the second half of the school year (July – October). Two new scholarship students from Portillon did not meet the minimal standard and were delayed payments until after June exams. We also put that scholarship money in escrow with Roney, who provided the appropriate written receipt.



*Scholar recipient and mom, happy to receive support to continue school.*

University student, Antonia Garcia Cabrera, submitted a grade report for her Teaching Certificate program, received her full annual stipend. She is currently in the second-to-last year of her program, which should complete by December 2020. As you may remember, she was one of our first scholarship students and a great success story. She is now the kindergarten teacher in Portillon.

### School Visit

#### School Supplies

During first week in San Jose, Paul partnered with the dental brigade to three schools, San Jose, Portillon and Guanacaste. At each school visit, we met with many of the teachers. The school supplies provided by 1st UU members were equally divided among these schools. A few items were earlier donated to a pre-school program for 15 kids, operating in Mangal (by volunteer teacher Celestina).

### Gift of Music

While in Portillon, Paul had the unique privilege to present the school with a special gift of \$1000 for the purchase of musical instruments, which they have been requesting for years. Our longtime sponsor Dr. Jean Hamlin (and former GH resident) was the benefactor of this special-purpose gift.

### Teacher In-service

The Teacher In-service was a brief and successful event with 14 teachers. Many copies of the Spanish-language curriculum and classroom materials were distributed at the end of the session -- which turned out to be fun for everyone.



*Portillon kindergarten*

After the brief teaching lesson, All of our teachers departed for La Esperanza, and then Comayagua, to join in a national Teachers and Doctors strike. Teachers are protesting their stagnant low wages (about \$300 per month in Intibucá, without adjustment for several years), and even more importantly, a recent federal law that may end up privatizing education and medical services for the entire nation of Honduras. Doctors and medical workers joined the strike in reaction to credible threats of reduced payment for their work under the new law. The jobs of our teachers are clearly also up in the air.

### Liaison with San Marcos School

Early in the week, I traveled to San Marcos, to renew acquaintance with Director Eliud Arauz Pereira, new Counselor Carla Melendez. First quarter grade reports for every scholarship student was provided to the writer, before scholarship distribution. I was introduced to the new English teacher Yalitza Garcia. English grades are already coming up significantly, only a few months after transition. Several students spoke positively about their new teacher in interviews. Additionally, I presented Migdalia Martinez (San Jose Centro), Roney Amaya (Portillon) and Profe Yalitza (San Marcos) with new “Ingles Para Latinos” texts, including complete audio of the approx. 80 discrete lessons in each volume, Levels 1 and 2). We hope there is a chance that these can be used to improve English preparation in elementary school, and English instruction in middle and high school.

*Submitted: Paul Suwijn, 1st Unitarian HM, 5-30-19*

### **Microfinance**

The University of Rochester brigade began making “microfinance” loans to community members beginning in 2012. These small loans, from around \$15-150 were awarded to individuals with the goal of jump-starting realistic small business plans, growing existing small businesses, and promoting overall financial independence and well being in San Jose. For example, loan recipients would use their loan to buy several piglets, then sell their pigs for a higher price several years later or use their money to invest in a cart to bring fruit grown in San Jose to market in town. Unfortunately, our group has repeatedly encountered challenges in collecting loans when they are due. When a loan recipient has a defaulted loan, the defaulter and their immediate family members are exempted from our other program offerings including scholarship and rural development programs. Loan defaulters still can access medical and dental care. Many challenges have arisen regarding the selection process for loan recipients-as U of R representatives lack an understanding of the local economy, as well as may not have the perspective to understand which individuals are “trustworthy” for loans. Additional challenges have included paper record keeping across brigade years, as well as frequent changeover of leadership as residents rotate through Honduras.

This year, Ryan and Alissa spent significant time examining paper loan records going back to 2012 to digitize and summarize the loan program. The last loans were made in May 2017. After entering the old paper records into excel, we found that roughly 1/3 of all loans made over the course of our program have not had any amount repaid and many remain only partially paid, amounting to roughly 34,000 Lempira, or roughly \$1,500 USD. Of note, several community members did come to repay their loans during our brigade, and will now be eligible for further community projects.

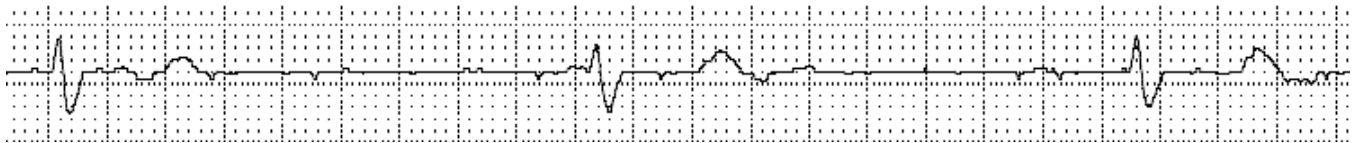
We held a meeting with community members to discuss the future of the microfinance program. Unfortunately, only three community members came to the meeting to discuss improving the program. This is significantly fewer than the number of community members who request access to loan funds. With our new data regarding the true amount of money that remains unpaid in the community, our community representatives together with Doug, Alissa and Ryan all decided to end making any further loans to San Jose community members for the foreseeable future. A number of San Jose residents have benefited greatly from the micro-loan program. We are sad to deny this help to those who routinely paid back their loans because of those recipients who never made an effort to pay back their loans.



*Clinic waiting room, with patients spilling onto the porch*

### **Medical care**

The clinic was very busy. We saw 164 patients. As always, common illnesses are common. We did have a number of children with pneumonia. Many of the older people have painful osteoarthritic joints so joint injections were done on many patients. We checked in with the man with the complete heart block. He passes out occasionally, but he keeps going. We brought an \$80 hand-held rhythm strip device. A patient who has always complained of a racing heart actually does have an arrhythmia. We obtained a few nexplanons prior to leaving for this trip that we placed in women who desired a long acting contraception. We also removed a few nexplanons.



As part of Doug's evening talk, he presented an overview of existing data on sexually transmitted diseases in Honduras. There is not much literature out there and the Honduran government does not track STD cases like the US does. However, we saw a number of HPV infections, a case of cervicitis, and PID. Doug did an impromptu talk on STDs to patients. The patients were engaged and a few of the men were interested enough to get condoms at the end of the talk.

### Some notable cases

The San Jose Centro school had an outbreak of impetigo. One of the teachers brought a 7-year-old girl to the clinic with impetigo on her nose and upper lip. Listening to her lungs revealed that she had harsh breath sounds in her left lower lobe which was concerning for pneumonia! She also had a fever. We prescribed antibiotics and had her follow up with us in a few days with good improvement. Several other children came to clinic with impetigo on several sites. Shown below are impetigo lesions on one student's neck.



*Girl with impetigo on neck*



A woman in her mid-20s came to clinic for irritation in her right eye for the past few days. Upon examination, she had only dry eyes and possible allergies. However, her left eye had a dark colored mole-like growth on the lower eyelid. It had come up over the last two months and was not painful but getting bigger. When the eyelid was everted, the dark pigment was visible on the inside of her eyelid. She was strongly encouraged to see an eye doctor in La Esperanza as the new growth was concerning for melanoma.

A gentleman presented to clinic with large and very classic psoriasis lesions. He had previously gone to the United States, but he moved back to Honduras to get better care for his psoriasis (ironic!). He was also advised that the sun would help his condition, but he was no longer on steroids to help his condition. He was prescribed oral and topical steroids to help his condition.

A woman in her 80s was brought to the clinic by her neighbors. She was known to have some developmental and intellectual disability, and she lived alone without anyone to care for her. She had severe pain and vision loss in her left eye due to an injury she sustained six months prior while cooking. An ember flew into her eye, and she had not been able to receive care for it. She had lost significant weight due to being unable to cook as the smoke from the wood stove caused severe irritation of her eye. She was a good example of how necessary our cookstove project is for safety. On exam, she had pain with the movements of her eyes which could be a sign of infection around the eye. She also had a hypopyon, a phenomenon where pus collects in the anterior chamber of the eye in front of the iris which indicates inflammation in the eye. We had her neighbors arrange for her to be taken immediately to the hospital in La Esperanza.



*Alissa performing knee injection*



*Psoriasis on patient's abdomen*

## **Home Visits**

### Announcing brigade arrival and an unplanned home visit

A few of our group members started our first day in San Jose by hiking to the homes of the residents of San Jose and surrounding communities to let them know that doctors and dentists had arrived. We make contact with as many community members as possible, trusting that word of mouth will spread the word to other people we are not able to speak with directly. It helped us warm up our Spanish and meet some of our future patients and scholarship students! Coincidentally, as we hiked down the mountain toward Portillon Ryan, Alissa and our interpreter Yovanny encountered a 71 year old woman who had recently had abdominal surgery. She was not sure exactly why she had been rushed to the OR, however our best guess was a high-grade bowel obstruction. She was continuing to have severe pain with movement, particularly while standing to grind corn meal, however she was otherwise doing well. Dr. Cummings and Correll examined her and found a very large exploratory surgery scar on her abdomen which was healing well, however we returned



*Layer of white blood cells just below the pupil*

later in the week with Tylenol to help in her recovery. We were able to see the homes of our patients and community members during this hike, and chat with them in their homes.

### Home Visits-Ceily

Alissa, Ryan and two interpreters returned to the home of Ceily, a 7 year old girl with severe cerebral palsy who lives about a two hour hike from our volunteer house. We have visited Ceily for the past 2-3 trips. When we are not in Honduras she is visited by a Christian delegation. Since our last visit, a physical therapist visited and taught her Mom massage techniques to help ease Ceily's spastic muscles. Since our last visit, Ceily's mom has delivered a new baby girl, and the house is busy, but her Mom continues to take exquisite care of Ceily! Her main challenge is nutrition and care for her skin, and we delivered nutrient-rich formula as well as supplies to care for Ceily's skin and teeth.



*Alissa and Ryan with their diminutive patient during a home visit*

### Weighing Babies

We were able to attend a gathering of families at one of the local schools where local government officials weigh infants and children and administer vaccinations. Here, Dr. Sam Kemp was able to take measurements of head size and facial features as part of her fetal alcohol syndrome study. We hope to be able to use some of the height and weight data gathered at this event to track the overall improvements in nutrition and weight gain in the children and adolescents in the San Jose area over the past 10-15 years.

### **Dental Program**

During this trip we continued working with Basic Package of Oral Health Care (BPOC) providing Oral Urgent Care. We had the participation of a Dental resident, Dr Edith Gonzales James and a Dental Assistant, Mary Nikikova both from Eastman Institute of Oral Health. This experience in rural Honduras brings a great opportunity for collaboration between the Department of Family Medicine and Eastman. We hope we have other GPR Residents join us for future trips.

As part of the fluoride program we continued applying fluoride varnish to the children of San Jose Centro, Portillon, and Guancaste with the help of the family medicine residents. We applied fluoride varnish to 367 children and 46 in adults. We ran out of time so we ended up delivering fluoride varnish to the others schools in Potrerros and Salitre. The teachers were trained on how to apply the varnish. We are hopeful the teachers will apply fluoride varnish to their 70 students.

We also hiked to the schools of Guancaste and Portillon and provide dental education to the students. In addition to applying fluoride varnish, we delivered 437 tubes of tooth paste and tooth brushes to the students. Unfortunately, we couldn't hike to Potrerros this trip. Dr Gonzales performed 26 WHO-form based dental examinations on the



*Government-supported baby weighing*

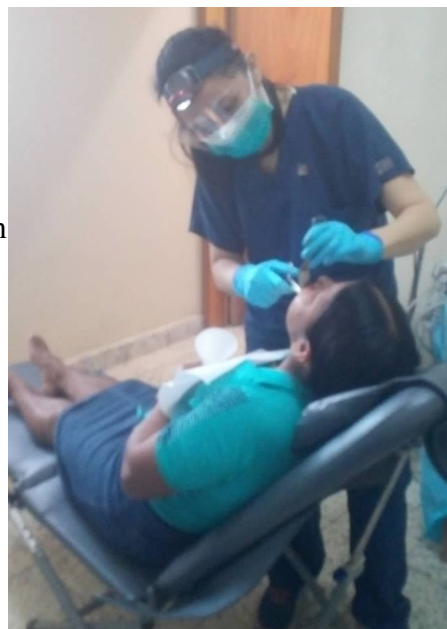


children attending San Jose Central School. This information improves our ability to track the dental health of the children.

We are planning to implement a Varnish Fluoride Program for the 5 schools instead of the rinse to try to have better compliance since we are not able to be present every week to monitor the rinse delivery.

We treated 156 dental patients. We completed 125 Extractions, 25 ART(atraumatic restoration ), 3 composite fillings, and 39 scalings and Fluoride application in adults. Extractions were the most common procedure but we also repaired cavities with Glass Ionomer on molars and composite fillings in anterior teeth.

We were able to perform several extractions at each visit, but due to the overwhelming demand, limits on extractions and other services were placed to allow for a greater number of people to be seen and cared for. The shortage of electricity made it difficult to perform restorative procedures.



*Edith working hard all day long to help those who cannot see a dentist anywhere else*

### **Cookstoves**

In the past 6 months, 19 more cook stoves were built. Most of these were built in the town of Salitre. We have been trying to engage this fairly new community for a few years. They have a new leader who is highly motivated. This has led to many more projects being built in Salitre. We are excited by this development.

### **Other rural development activities**

13 water filters were sold in the last 6 months. We sold an additional 8 filters during the brigade for a total of 21 new homes with filters. 9 pilas and 1 latrine were built since November. During this trip we arranged for another 10 pilas to be built, 10 latrines, and 3 cook stoves. We purchased the supplies in Esperanza and disbursed more than half the supplies before we returned to the US.

### **Agriculture**

#### Heirloom seeds

The most sought after seed of the 15,000+ seeds we brought to Honduras is for a scorpion hot pepper. This is currently ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> hottest pepper in the world. Six months ago we gave a few seeds to 6 different people. Last trip, only 1 farmer successfully grew the peppers. This trip we had another person successfully grow the peppers. As required, she gave us many seeds from her plants so we can keep sharing the seeds with others. She smiled broadly as she described how painfully hot



*Giant mangoes not affected by recent fire*

these peppers are. Another woman returned sweet pepper seeds and asked for other new seeds after looking through an heirloom seed catalog we brought.

Coffee Farming Cooperative

Coffee drinkers will be glad to know we brought back about 40 lbs of coffee for roasting and sale. The most active coffee grower was unfortunately at the US border trying to enter the US, so we were unable to talk with him. We did talk with his wife and son. They are keeping the farm going. Another farmer who we bought coffee from last trip did not come to see us. Therefore, we did not get more coffee from him for this trip. It is possible he owes a micro-loan and trying to remain scarce.

**Update on Project Status** (updated 05/23/2019)

Project	Completed	Project	Completed
Cookstoves	351	Scholarships	100+ students, 36 current scholars
Filters	385	Micro-loans	196 loans, \$10,658
Latrines	148	Fish farms	6
Pilas	107	Piped water systems	5 communities
Heirloom seeds	>15,000 given		

**Your Help is Needed**

We believe in low cost, simple technology solutions that the Hondurans can learn and maintain on their own. We are doing a great job in this respect. However, even simple interventions cost money. To continue the exceptional work we are doing in Honduras, we need more funds. If you have the financial ability and appreciate the great improvements our activities are bringing to rural Hondurans, please take a minute and donate to our project. Donations are tax deductible if you itemize your taxes. We are very fortunate to have the assistance of the Department of Family Medicine and dedicated volunteers to almost eliminate overhead expenses. Therefore, your donation will reach the Hondurans and not be spent on less helpful expenses such as rent for a dedicated US office or US-based secretarial support. If you would like to donate to the San Jose project, please make a check payable to “HH Foundation – GH Fund HFM”. Mail the check to “Highland Family Medicine 777 Clinton Ave, South Rochester, NY 14620 Attn: Douglas Stockman”.

**Summary**

The greater Rochester Family Medicine community has touched so many lives in Honduras and the Hondurans have enriched so many of our lives. As is true for all development projects, there will be setbacks. These are learning opportunities and allow us to improve future interventions. This cross-cultural project is realizing huge benefits for everyone involved, even with a few setbacks. The scholarship students gain confidence as well as a chance at a path out of poverty. Seeing the smiles and appreciation as people display their running water, new cook-stove, or water filter is so rewarding. Through these very intimate person-to-person exchanges we maintain hope that a better world will become a reality one community at a time. Thanks to everyone for their continued support to make this project such a great success.

Douglas Stockman, MD

Barbara Gawinski, PhD



Thanks to other trip members who wrote much of this report.



*Melissa, Paulet, Edith, Sam, Mary, Ryan, Paul  
Doug, Matt, Alissa, Yovanni, Diego*

**Other photos**



Paul and Sam working in pharmacy



Lina and Ryan applying dental fluoride



Alissa and Melissa educating on proper medication use