

July 14, 2009

Wanted: Courage in the Face of Disaster

Political Problems in Honduras means more suffering for the poor: Transitions of power include uncertainty. Recent events in Honduras highlight this reality. For the past 20 years, Shoulder to Shoulder has worked with all types of governments. We continue to do so today. In light of recent events however, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and donor states, including the U.S. have or are planning to, withhold the millions of dollars of aid currently funding support for poor people in the hemisphere's third poorest country. This includes Shoulder to Shoulder projects!

Will the political problem affect Shoulder to Shoulder? Shoulder to Shoulder serves over 40,000 people in the isolated mountains of Honduras who depend on the health care, nutrition and the educational services that support the poor. Shoulder to Shoulder also depends on this very foreign aid for over \$20,000 per month to buy medicines, pay physicians' and nurses' salaries and deliver services to the poorest areas. We were due for payment two weeks ago and we are uncertain if and when it will come. We are also not certain of the fate of the German government foundation the GTZ, which has agreed to fund a Shoulder to Shoulder project to place 1000 fuel efficient smokeless stoves in the most remote communities.

Is Travel to Honduras Safe? Shoulder to Shoulder programs and brigades remain on schedule despite recent events.

Shoulder to Shoulder's travel policy is influenced by our experience and by the policies of well-established organizations such as the U.S. Peace Corp working within Honduras. The U.S. Peace Corp has lifted all travel restrictions for their volunteers in Honduras. This is significant because that organization is very cautious, has a demonstrated track record responding to sensitive political situations and is in close contact with information from national and international sources. Art Ranz, COO, Shoulder to Shoulder, spent last week in Honduras. He traveled freely without restriction. He reported that unless you watched the news, you would know nothing of the situation. The San Pedro airport, the one that Shoulder to Shoulder uses, was never closed, contrary to what was reported in the press. Our staff on the ground has travelled freely even in the Tegucigalpa area without any difficulty.

Travel and service to the poor in Honduras will never be perfectly safe. However, our staff and the communities we serve are vigilant in protecting the safety and security of Shoulder to Shoulder volunteers. Presently, travel to our sites in Honduras is as safe as it has ever been. Although there can be no guarantee of future events, we remain confident of the situation and will continue monitoring events on a daily basis on the ground in Honduras.

The poor are suffering the worst from these developments. Although the US Department of State has issued a "travel alert," that is no different than warning people not to travel to the Caribbean during Hurricane season, something we have been doing year after year.

Funds are at risk of being cut off that support the very programs that help the poor the most. They need your help now more than ever.

If brigade members decide to cancel travel, we will fully refund any money paid to Shoulder to Shoulder. Unfortunately, airfare refunds are out of our control because the tickets are issued in the participant's name. Presently, most airlines are issuing 100 percent credits for cancelled travel to Honduras, but we expect this to change in the future.

What are we doing and what do we need:

Mostly money, secondly volunteers and the courage to remain committed to these communities! Because the people still need all that we are doing:

Health Services: The clinic in Santa Lucia is as busy as ever. This year we will be strengthening our immunization coverage, targeting chronic diseases in the elderly and hopefully finding and installing a new digital xray machine. The comprehensive clinic in Concepcion is scheduled to open to medical services in January of 2010. It will double the population in range of Shoulder to Shoulder medical services. The smaller clinics in Pinares, San Antonio, Magdalena and San Jose, El Negrito continue to provide services at the local level. Our two dental clinics provide high quality restorative dentistry.

Nutrition: The Mathile Institute for Human Nutrition continues to support our efforts to provide supplement feeding to all children under two in the municipalities of Santa Lucia, Magdalena and San Antonio. Ongoing research will enable us to determine the best methods and formulation for complementary feeding practices.

Water: We continue to deliver hundreds of home based water filters to the rural areas. These are much desired by the local people as they are able to see dramatic reductions in the rate of diarrhea.

What will happen if the political situation is not resolved and less volunteers come?

The extent of services provided can not be sustained with the current level of giving and volunteering if international funding dries up. Given the nature of politics and the intransigence on both sides it is unlikely that things will change in the next six months. We do not expect violence but if it does occur there will be likely a further deterioration of the economic situation for the poor and the demand for services will increase.

Shoulder to Shoulder still is an efficient low overhead organization. Your donation will buy medicines, deliver services to poor people in remote areas and pay salaries of health providers. Please be bold.

Please Respond Now: This enormous setback threatens to stall or stem the work of Shoulder to Shoulder at a time when our momentum and support is at an all-time high. For over 20 years, Shoulder to Shoulder has been a constant partner, avoiding the "quick fix" approach of many NGOs who arrive with lofty promises and then quickly vanish without any sustained progress. In contrast, our presence today among the needy is felt more than ever – Shoulder to Shoulder's clinics, health centers, and field operations

currently provide services to 20,000 people.

So as the world's eyes and ears are turned to the back-and-forth during this transition of power, we must remember that the real battle is being waged in silence: the daily struggle of Honduras' poor against hunger, disease, and despair.

So help us take full advantage of our recent momentum and continue your support of Shoulder to Shoulder when it is needed most. Please [click here](#) to read our exciting recent StoS status.

Jeffery E Heck, MD

Executive Director

Art Ranz, DDS

Chief Executive Officer

Wayne Waite, Esq.

Board President