



# Ocote' Paulino Brigade News

Fall 2010

## News from Ocote' Paulino's Fall Brigade

Thanks to everyone who made another successful brigade possible! We managed to see more patients (around 450) than in the spring despite a three-day delay due to tropical storm Richard. Our enthusiastic group hit the ground running, and we were able to begin some much-anticipated preventative programs. We trialed the use of fluoride dental enamel designed to be applied every six months. 'Abla la bocha' chants echoed throughout the building as we successfully applied this much needed cavity protector to over one hundred willing, if not a bit wary, children. Plans are to expand the program to all children in Ocote Paulino, and hopefully some surrounding smaller communities, next spring. Although we love our dentist Dr. Victor, we are hoping to see a decrease from the close to 400 teeth pulls that he did during his last visit. We are also continuing our education on teeth brushing. Donations of toothbrushes and toothpaste are always needed.

Malnutrition secondary to micronutrients such as vitamin A, iron, zinc, and vitamin D is a reality in the rural villages in Honduras. Lack of these essential building blocks impairs physical growth, intellectual development, and immunity. This trip, we trialed the use of a 'chispudito' supplement – a soy and corn based vitamin powder to be mixed with water or milk and given daily. We obtained baseline heights and weights on over 150 children before passing out supplies of the supplement. Wendy, the local public health nurse, shared child population demographics for the town and surrounding areas, and the hope is to obtain enough supplements to provide a six month supply each visit for all children age 6 months to 5 years. We are looking forward to provide everyone with some very positive growth results in the next few years!

Water quality and availability are long-standing major health threats in Ocote Paulino. The water filter project was discussed during our biannual Health Council meeting. Plans are in the works to begin distributing the filters free-of-charge to local families in need. The health council has identified 25 families who still do not have access to the local water system. A \$300 cost to 'tap in' is thought to be the reason for most. Grants are currently being explored through local Morgantown sources and in Ocote Paulino to provide funding for these families. Also, this spring much time was spent discussing the building of another well in town. We are happy to report that, in part due to your donations, that this third well was completed just prior to our fall trip!



Members of the Health Council



Members of the Fall Brigade

## Welcome,

We are very happy to present you with the first newsletter from our brigades to Ocote Paulino, Honduras. Our first brigade to this community was in October 2007. Thomas Adamski, MD, and Dana Friend, RN, CNP, MPH, and I, with the help of nurses and health care providers from the University of Pittsburgh, went to Ocote Paulino for the first time and started to work with the community. The participation has grown greatly and we have been able to expand the services and projects there. We have been touched by the welcoming reception from our Honduran contact Medardo Rodriguez, local Honduran nurses Wendy and Dacey, the Honduran health committee, and the entire community of Ocote Paulino. As Director of the Global Health Program here at West Virginia University, I believe the collaboration with Shoulder-to-Shoulder, the University of Pittsburgh, and the community of Ocote Paulino is an exciting and hopeful one for all who are involved. I would like to sincerely thank all members of this brigade, and past brigades, for their help and support. I would also like to thank all of those that have donated funds, supplies, and ideas.

The next Honduras brigade is scheduled for April 9 – 16, 2011. We hope to keep you informed of our progress there, and we appreciate any support or suggestions you may have. Muchas gracias!

Melanie A. Fisher, MD, MSc  
Professor of Medicine  
Director, Global Health Program  
Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center  
West Virginia University

## Cyclebeads

The rate of early childbearing has declined globally, yet remains high among adolescents in rural Honduras. The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) program reported that 79.2% of ever-married 15-19 year old females from rural areas had either been pregnant or had a child. Fertility rates for 15-19 year olds is 137 per 1,000 women. (DHS, 2002-2007).

A new family planning method developed by researchers at the Institute of Reproductive Health, Georgetown University, called the Standard Days Method (SDM) is gaining popularity worldwide. Based on fertility awareness and the knowledge that the menstrual cycle is made of a fertile phase between infertile phases, this method can be used by women with cycle lengths of 26-32 days and can help prevent pregnancy by educating women on how to recognize their fertile period and avoid unprotected sex during this time. This method involves using a string of colored beads called Cyclebeads to track the phases of the menstrual cycle. It lacks side effects, is simple, easy, natural, and scientific, which makes it appealing to couples who are not currently using any method, those who rely on traditional methods and those who are dissatisfied with alternate methods.

The Cyclebeads provide a cost-effective and sustainable method for preventing pregnancies. Decreases in unwanted or untimely pregnancies have the potential to improve the quality of life of not only women, by reducing maternal mortality, nutritional deficiency, complications of pregnancy, unsafe abortions, etcetera, but can also improve quality of life of the entire family, mainly by improving the economic condition and making it more affordable to provide for one's children and keep them healthy and happy. Innovative inventions such as the Cyclebeads are publicized and implemented in urban areas, but remote, hard-to-reach, poverty-stricken rural areas are often forgotten. Ocote Paulino is one such area. The people of villages such as Ocote Paulino should not be forgotten and efforts must be continuously made to reach out to them. Therein lies the social responsibility of public health projects and public health practitioners.

Mousumi Banikya-Leaseburg, MBBS [MPH student]



## Gracias ~ Thank You!

Our effort to provide services to the people of Ocote' Paulino would not be possible without the generous donations of many, many individuals, groups and organizations. We would also like to give a special thanks to all the wonderful individuals who helped with and attended our first fundraiser, an Elimination Dinner and Silent Auction, that was held in August.

We received donations of time, goods and services and hard cash from so many people. We have listed below a small sample of the many individuals who contributed and hope that you will understand if we have accidentally left off your name.

Please know that every donation received was appreciated and put to good use. The people of Ocote' Pauline and all of the brigade members thank you!

Westover Rotary  
Washington Hospital  
Fisher Scientific  
Dr. David Fogarity

WVU Community Medicine Student Assoc.  
Kathy Gorski  
Ocote' Paulino School Children  
Shoulder to Shoulder, Mo Jennings  
Donna & John Tritle

Shauns Shades  
Knights of Columbus  
St. Francis Church  
Conrad & Dorothy Pesyna  
Jacque Visyak

## What is a Medical Brigade?

Do you know what a medical brigade is, what the purpose is or who the volunteers are? What reflections do you carry after an experience such as this? What new friends or bonds do you make as an insider of a medical brigade? I will try to answer some of these questions from my perspective as a Honduran translator.

What do I see as an insider? Every time a brigade is going to start I prepare my luggage to see what clothes I'm going to need in the unknown place that I am going and for the unseen weather that I'm going to see. Second, when I'm on the trip to my destination, for example Ocote Paulino, I am wondering 'what are the expectations of me and the group?' My final questions are 'are we going to have an impact in this community and are we accomplishing everything that we planned for?'

Usually when I'm in the middle of a brigade I can see a lot of people with need, poverty, and sickness. This makes you reflect on all of the things that you take for granted – from a hot shower to a good meal or a great job. And when you see the kids smile, it makes you realize that all of your sacrifices and all of your effort is worth it, because you are using everything you've got to change someone's life. And to change someone's life is all you need to start to change a whole community. A project like this does not start out big; it begins like a little child in which you have to feed until he grows, until he is able to sustain on his own. And that is when you realize that all your sacrifice is worth it. Personally, when I'm in these terrible conditions, like no TV, no cable or luxuries I start to complain. But when I see a child laughing in joy for only a couple of crayons or vitamins or markers that you have given him, it inspires me to go further - it is so rewarding and so priceless that in that moment I feel that I have a mission, a dream. That mission is to be a blessing for life, a blessing to other people.

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## Fence Building has Begun!

The area surrounding the clinic was full of dirt and rocks this fall. However, this time the dirt was for concrete, and the blocks were for the wall being designed to enclose the clinic property. Work had begun in the week previous to our arrival, courtesy of the Public Health Council Members. Plans are to eventually encircle the entire area around the clinic. Thanks to generous donations and our very successful fundraiser in August, we were able to purchase the needed steel, block, and cement. The local Public Health Council had identified construction of a fence to keep livestock out of the building and surrounding grounds as a public health priority. We are looking forward to seeing the completed project this spring!



## The Need for Glasses

Our April brigade took over a 150 pairs of reading glasses to Ocote' Paulino and thought we were doing well until they were ALL dispensed by mid-week. Obviously there was a greater need than thought! This October we took 350 pair of reading glasses and 90 pair of sunglasses.

The sunglasses were all distributed by noon of the first day. By the end of the brigade, we had about 12 pair of reading glasses remaining. The glasses were mostly from Restoring Vision, an agency dedicated to providing low-cost glasses to developing countries. After placing an order with them, we were contacted by Shaun Patterson of Shaun's Shades, who is starting a business with a motto "Buy one, Give one." For every pair of glasses he sells, he donates a pair. So in exchange for taking some pictures of dispensing the glasses, he paid for all the glasses we had purchased for the brigade!



## What is a Brigade? Continued from page 2

Even though I'm a translator, I think that my job is more than just translating from doctor to patient and vice versa. For me it also means that I have a special place in the middle of this, not only translating words but transmitting feelings from one to another. When I see this happening I feel lucky because I can see a loving and caring doctor treating a patient, and a patient being loving to his doctor. These kinds of special moments make me think that there is enough time to make the world a better place. Because as long as there is hope and love, caring and sharing, anything is possible.

Another good moment that I witness is the transformation of the play of children. It starts in complete chaos, but as time passes by peace starts to rise above them, and then you start to see their moral values – they start sharing crayons, they share drawing ideas, they share their admirations for one another's drawings, and they socialize better. In time, they have a fun time. And this respect is vital to their future, because one's life is based in one's childhood. If you have a good childhood, you tend to be a better person with better thoughts, better intentions, and better ideas for your community. This makes us realize that the children are the main pillars in this and many other communities. How we treat them or raise them is a decisive factor of a community.

My favorite part in the brigade is the bond - the bond between translator and doctor and the bond between translator and patient. I felt that it is the unification of two nations working together as brothers, and helping poor people and lifting up healthy communities. And being part of this process is a once in a lifetime experience and cannot be compared, or bought, with anything in the world. The group's chemistry is what surprises me even more, and at the end of it you just know you did a good thing for mankind and poor kids and this defines you as a great person in life, because of your actions, sacrifices, and willingness to do for others.

So in other words, I love to be a part of this living miracle in life. There is no better place to be than in a medical brigade!



Josh Garcia

Hometown: Tela, Honduras

*Josh is currently a college student in San Pedro Sula. Because of yet another university strike that cancelled this semester's classes, he was able to join us this fall on the brigade as a translator. Funny and a hard worker, Josh spent the first 7 years of his life in the US before returning with his mother to his homeland. He aspires to return to the US and attend Pitt University.*

## Dental Care

The October 2010 brigade started a new dental fluoride program for the children of Ocote' Paulino. Through many generous donations we were able to purchase fluoride varnish for about 100 children. This simple procedure involves painting all tooth surfaces with the fluoride paste, waiting for 15 seconds and then spitting. SIMPLE!

Ideally, this should be done for every child every 6 months. This not only helps to prevent tooth decay but it also slows the decay in existing cavities.



We were also able to provide each child a toothbrush and instruct them in proper brushing techniques.

Our plans are to expand this program to treat all of the children and to provide training to the local community members so that they may offer this service on an on-going basis.

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