

## What a View!!



It is certainly one of the most spectacular vistas in all of Honduras, if not the world. Sitting outside the clinic at Pinares, or at the school where Virginia Commonwealth University and Fairfax Family Practice Centers house their brigades, one looks northwest toward the expansive Honduran mountain ranges of Lempira, Ocotepeque, and Copan. As busy as one might be, as anxious as one might feel, as pressing as agendas present themselves, it seems impossible not to be drawn into the profound tranquility the majesty of these ancient mountains generously gift to the viewer. And yet few are privileged to benefit from this inspirational, rejuvenating, life-affirming view. No tourists travel here. Those who enjoy the grandeur of this place also live here and seldom leave. They fail to recognize the unique beauty as it is, for them, commonplace, and they have no means to make comparison. Along the road, just below the school and the clinic, a few well-kept homes, an underutilized lodge-style hotel, and one road-side restaurant, are the only signs of inhabitants in this otherwise virgin-looking land. But there are many who live here. They have settled deep within the curves and crevices of the mountainous terrain; hidden by it, almost having become part of it, they generally go unnoticed by the rest of the world. It is so easy to pass them by along the highway, here paved, but soon only gravel, and winding down to other more obvious towns and populations. Mostly they are passed by, and like the mountains they offer no complaint. For what is present, for what is beautiful, and for what is hidden, it is all easily missed, save for those who are willing to take the time to discover.



VCU / FFPCS at the clinic

Virginia Commonwealth University and Fairfax Family Practice Centers have taken that time. Seventeen brigade participants were recently here. Though I'm certain that they thoroughly enjoyed the view from their clinic where they offered medical care and from the school where they were housed, they also, once again explored the crevices and curves of the mountain terrain to meet people where they live.

They visited schools and implemented the CHI (Children's Health Initiative) program. They visited the small aldeas and the homes nestled among the mountains. If these persons, like the tremendous view, are often ignored, unseen, or missed, that is not the case for VCU / FFPCS. Apart from the excellent medical care, apart from the attention and aid in development and education, and apart from the commitment to maintaining a presence at the health clinic, VCU / FFPCS offer the dignity of relationship. The view is very much appreciated.



An intense meeting

Unfortunately due to an extremely heavy schedule, Laura and I did not meet up with them until their last evening at the clinic and the school. We participated in a very critical meeting with the brigade leaders and the local leaders from the health committee. The meeting was a bit intense. It was focused on how VCU / FFPCS in collaboration with Shoulder to Shoulder and our contract with the Honduran Ministry of Health can open up regular medical care in the humble Pinares clinic. It's a challenging topic because everyone's resources are stretched. As the meeting progressed I found my attention drawn to the breathtaking view of the mountains. It gave me a sense of security and hope in the midst of a challenging conversation. I also focused on a horse belonging to one of the health committee leaders, tied to a tree just to my right and part of the view of the expansive horizon. He seemed unconcerned and unaffected by our conversation. Still, somehow he seemed to possess a greater wisdom. He so well belonged to this place. He evoked a sense of security and pride, and somehow observing him I was convinced that all things will be well.



A patient horse

The meeting ended with a sense of hope that we would all do our best to see that the communities in and around the Pinares clinic would continue to benefit from an ongoing relationship with Shoulder to Shoulder and VCU / FFPCS. After the meeting the community leader untied his horse, mounted him, and headed off to his home. Beneath that incredible horizon, the horse found his way among the winding, mountain paths. Those familiar paths are known to few others than those who live there. I would be lost, perhaps even afraid, but the horse is steady and sure. VCU / FFPCS have also travelled along many

of those same paths. In the end, this willingness to accompany persons upon the familiar paths of their lives is the only way to generate hope.



Woman waiting at the Pinares Clinic

It is all such an amazing view!