



PazSalud brigada de ojos agosto 2006  
Surgical Eye Brigade August 2006  
Lanetta Lundberg

## **Invaders to Crusaders**

### **Monday, August 7.**

We arrived at the hospital at 0800, converged into the OR and set up our command station in the middle of the OR staging area. The RNs, Janet, Tina, Claudia and Kitty were great and gave way to the invasion. We all felt their looks of wonderment and loss of control. We certainly had invaded and taken over. As soon as we arrived we went to work in what we thought our assigned areas to be. What we weren't sure of was how exactly it fit the rest of the assignments. Kathy Garcia remained calm, but was keenly aware of letting us dance the dance. After all, she has been through the "concentrate and transition" part many times. With each brigade the parts that are new each time are the location, dynamics of the local organizers, facilities, supplies and how quickly the team will come together. Kathy has a knack for putting groups together and having them meld. Ours was not exception. We weren't feeling so confident as we trudged forward. Another area of trepidation was providing care in a sterile environment. The last thing anyone wanted to do was risk a septic wound. What we were stepping into was a different level and we needed to adapt as best we could. We noticed cockroaches in the patient rooms, tiny ants in the newborn isolets and the constant a struggle to keep the environment sterile as possible. Even in our uncertainty, we could sense the energy and

concentration by the two surgeons and nurses. The goal was to accomplish 8 to 10 procedures per day during the 5 days. We were already well into the morning of the first day waiting to start procedure number 1. The air in the room was heavy with heat, humidity and tension.



First patient entered OR at 0940. We anticipated procedure number one to be the longest and bulkiest – it proved to be true. Eighty-eight year old Jose couldn't have been more patient and trusting. He was willing to go into uncharted territory and gave his total trust. He remained stoic and still though out the procedure and finally 2 hours later he was wheeled to his room. It was just before noon.



Whew!! The first procedure was done. By the end of day one six patients had implants and were resting comfortably on the new sheets.

## **Tuesday, Day 2**

First thing Tuesday morning the patients from Monday received their post-op examination. Everyone waited with baited breath, especially the surgeons, for the results. We can't tell you the feeling when the first bandage was removed and the doctor raised his hand and asked, "Can you see this?" The patient looked up and smiled. Yes, he could see the doctor's hand. What joy.



From there we heard patients say, "¡Yo mirro! Este un milagro!" (I can see. It is a miracle). Many expressed their thanks to God and the great work we were sent to do. The team felt over and over the sincere expressions of gratitude and the credit that we were sent by God.

Each post op patient received a complete exam, vision assessment and instructions to wear the plastic eye shield for at least 2 weeks. One patient in particular had secured his shield by wrapping tape around his head in two directions and securing the shield to the tape with impressive threading through the side slots. He was going to make darn sure the shield was secure.



So for the next 4 days the previous days patients came in first to start the post-op exam and new patients cycled through for their procedure. Tuesday was our longest day with 10 successful procedures, plus babies, babies, babies - we must have witnessed about a dozen births through out the week – eight alone on Tuesday. Moms would be rolled in either directly to the delivery room or labor room. Our “clinic” was set up in the middle of the room where laboring moms are wheeled in on gurneys. Several times we would have to move our chairs to allow moms to either be transported to the labor room or delivery room – we were right in the middle. It was quite a production to see moms wheeled in, babies born, brought out to the isolets right beside us, mom’s wheeled out of the delivery room on a high gurney without rails, be parked along side the nurses station counter and wait for a couple of hours until taken back to the ward. Babies would rest in the isolet with a light bulb to warm them and when mom came out the baby would be placed along side mom. After birth, both mom and baby waited patiently for the next couple of hours until they were taken back to the room. An interesting observation was how quiet mom and baby were. I don’t recall hearing a crying baby once, even when they were waiting to return to mom. Dads were not part of the program. They would either wait outside or see their new addition some other time. We sensed and soon learned we were in a very macho society.

**Wednesday, August 9:** We felt like our rhythm was starting to fall into place. We were more comfortable with the patient flow, moved the patients at a smoother pace and were able to anticipate the need of the moment much easier. The portable autoclave had been moved from Central Processing to an area in the OR. Hilda was the keeper of the autoclave and always had the instruments sterilized and ready for the next case. We actually made it back to the Romero center by 5:00 PM and all welcomed the early evening. Some of us walked the short distance to the pay phone and made brief calls home to let family know we were fine and doing well. Others went on the internet at the Cyber Café located within the Romero Center. Once again, in a very remote and poor area of the country we found internet access. Bizarre.

**Thursday, August 10:** We were in the groove on Thursday. We felt at home in the hospital and the hospital staff was accustomed to seeing us come and go. OR patients came and they went, all in patient silence, except for the gentleman patient who serenaded us with song. He didn't have his guitar with him because all of the strings were broken, but his voice was velvety and golden. It didn't matter to him if half of his teeth were missing. He smiled and sang with elegance.

The routine felt comfortable, so much so that Ernon and I left the hospital grounds and took a walk about Jiquilisco. It was good to stretch and get the blood flowing through our bodies. Water retention was a problem with everyone, but I had not realized that my ankles had swollen to twice the size, which is something I'm not prone to. We literally guzzled uncountable bottles of Gatorade® throughout the week. Anyway, it felt very good to take a nice long walk. We saw typical homes of varying degrees of economic level. We saw evidence of the 2001 earthquake, new asphalt covering old brick roads,

abundant flowers growing wildly in yards, women and children doing the daily chores, the cadre of animals in the poorer areas milling about. But then Ernon guided me to the local market. What an experience. As we advanced deeper into the market the atmosphere changed from the colorful stalls with what you would expect with food, clothing, toiletries, and shoes to a dark and deeper area. The stalls and people transitioned from selling goods into focusing on preparing food. It was dark, hot and dirty. We saw piles of coal and wood waiting to fuel the fire under pots of cooking food. The atmosphere and feel was something out of the medieval dark days of a primitive place, somewhat reminiscent of Old London, but much hotter. There was lots of activity, noise and heads of the merchants looking up from time to time. They were curious and wondering why we were there. I don't know who the food was being prepared for and where it was going; Ernon and I were the only visitors. Maybe the plan was to transfer the food to the outer perimeter of the market and sell it from there. Once again, especially in the inner bowels of the cooking stalls, it looked to be a hard life with little reward.

