

The Opal House-Rotary Medical Mission team has conducted its ninth surgical mission trip to the Hospital Obras Sociales de Monsignor Gregorio Schaffer (HOSMOGRESCH) in San Lucas Tolimán, Guatemala. This was the first operational trip since March 2019. Unfortunately, our March 2020 trip was cancelled upon the team's arrival into San Lucas Tolimán due to the developing COVID-19 pandemic. Mandates from the Guatemalan government restricted our return while we have kept communication with the hospital as to their needs and methods by which we could help orchestrate a successful return.

The mission or “jornada” was again sponsored by the Fidalgo Island Rotary Club of Anacortes, Washington (www.fidalgorotary.org) and co-hosted by Opal House (www.opalhouseguatemala.com) with additional logistics support from Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare (<https://www.gillettechildrens.org>), the Podiatry Institute (www.podiatryinstitute.com) and private donors. The primary focus is surgical reconstructive of pediatric limb deformities, primarily of the lower extremity. Surgeries were performed by five podiatric surgeons and two pediatric orthopedic surgeons. Our veteran team of volunteers also included anesthesiologists, nurse anesthetists, a team of skilled nurses, an orthopedic physician assistant, surgical techs, a biomechanical engineer, administrative organizers and support staff.

This surgical mission evolved out of the efforts of volunteers Will and Diane Boegel who were called back to Guatemala after a medical mission. Their life mission has become service of the poor (especially the women and children), the indigent, the sick and the forgotten. Amongst the natural beauty of the land and Lake Atitlán, the local people face many hardships, particularly the Maya community, emerging from a 36 year civil war.

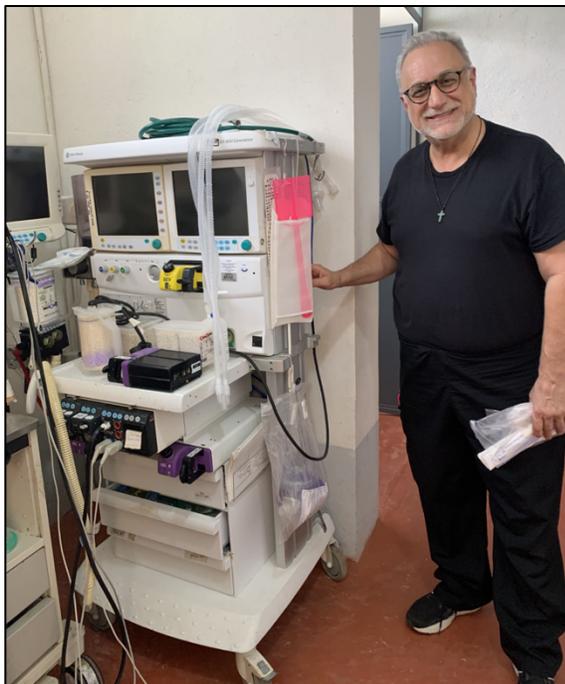
The Boegel's sold their house in the US and moved onto a finca (farm – Opal House) near the town of Agua Escondida, 20 km from San Lucas Tolimán. This year the Boegel's held a team welcome and inauguration of the Opal House's on-site pediatric treatment clinic: introduced by Dr. Boegel as the “Stephen J. Miller Clinic” in honor of our team's Dr. Miller who has selflessly served and devoted his life in the treatment of the pediatric population throughout

the third world, including Guatemala. This clinic will allow Dr. Boegel to continue to treat his clinic patients and also allow him to screen them for surgical candidacy for our future missions. This clinic will also serve a vital role as Dr. Boegel provides post-operative treatment of our surgical patients.

Dr. Stephen J. Miller (right; standing) with Dr. Rafael Tun, Daniel Xep Tuiz, Dr. Will Boegel, “Neato” Pablo Benedito and Julio Lopez (right; sitting from left to right) at the opening of the Stephen J. Miller Clinic (below).



Dr. Stephen Miller continues to fundraise and orchestrate transportation of medical equipment to the Guatemalan hospital. Those endeavors are huge in allowing to allow our surgeons to optimally operate and effect limb deformity correction. This is the first mission in which we utilized the two completely refurbished GE Aestiva 5 anesthesia machines, acquired by Dr. Constantine Kokenes and shipped by Dr. Miller. These new devices allow safe anesthesia



for our patients and also for patients of the other surgical specialty teams that serve the hospital throughout the rest of the year. The state-of-the-art Dexcwin handheld portable x-ray machine with TigerView digital software also enhanced our capabilities for pre-operative, intra-operative and post-operative radiograph capture and immediate evaluation. This allows for a speedier process, less radiation and a permanent store of the images for future reference and study. The ability to immediately capture radiographs also allows Dr. Boegel to analyze patients in remote locations he serves.

Dr. Constantine Kokenes, former anesthesiologist at DeKalb Medical / Emory Healthcare, proudly demonstrates an anesthesia machine he helped acquire and transport to Guatemala. Now he can use this to provide safe anesthesia to our patients.

The HOSMOGRESCH serves more than 34,000 people locally, mostly who are Mayan, without discrimination of any sort. Patients were procured via the local clinics and networks of Dr. Tun and Dr. Boegel. As our former patients have spread the word and informed others in their communities of our mission, more potential patients seem to find us each year. Several NGOs also bring patients (and family members) from remote villages for evaluation and treatment when possible. These include *Embrace Guatemala* (Brian Stipek)-and *Hope Haven* (Dick Rutgers). Some patients came from as far away as the Mexican border and the Pacific coast. The yearly transportation of the remote patients to and from the hospital is crucial to provide access to care.

As usual, Dr. Rafael Tun, the Medical Director was not only welcoming but both extremely helpful and grateful throughout the “jornada”. He was involved at every level in the evaluation and treatment decisions. The Hospital Administrator, Julio Lopez, and the Director of Logistics, Pablo Benedicto, were extremely helpful. Following our weekly review and academic discussions, the hospital’s staff was lead by Dr. Tun serenading us goodbye with a special guitar and singing performance.

The hospital is supported by Friends of San Lucas (FOSL) (<http://www.sanlucasmision.org/healthcare.php>) headquartered in Minnesota. Our team leaders serve as volunteers on the hospital’s Surgical Subcommittee to vocalize our experiences, identify our needs and ultimately aid Dr. Tun and the hospital.



Drs. Louis Jimenez (left), Carl Kihm and Wynn Perlick (bottom left) evaluate and perform clubfoot reconstructive surgery to straighten the twisted, congenital clubfoot deformity in San Lucas, Guatemala and surrounding regions. In correcting the child’s foot alignment, these children can live a more functional life. A huge, immediate improvement is visualized when comparing the pre-op photos (top right) to the post-op photos (bottom right). Next year we will operate on the other foot to get her two feet that face the same direction. The final outcome will be experienced the subsequent year when her bones have healed, she has increased strength with therapy and she is walking well with minimal or no pain.



Pathology encountered included torsional extremity disorders, nonunions, malunions, hip dislocations, osteomyelitis, hardware for removal, tumors, cerebral palsy, clubfoot (virgin, rigid, neglected, residual and partially corrected), isolated equinus, amniotic bands (Streeters) including one adult requiring amputation, and finger deformities. The team evaluated 36 patients and 33 patients underwent surgical reconstruction, including several neglected clubfeet. Some younger, more malleable patients with clubfoot were treated via Ponsetti casting including an infant only a few days old.

Acquiring the needed medications and supplies is becoming much more challenging and expensive. Getting most medications through Customs in Guatemala is nearly impossible. We are grateful to both corporate and private donors as well as the several Rotary clubs that made contributions, especially the Fidalgo Island Rotary Club of Anacortes, Washington which is our primary sponsor. With assistance of the hospital, we are purchasing medications in Guatemala in preparation for our mission. Surgical equipment and medications from Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare are much appreciated, as is support from the Podiatry Institute.

Many of our patients present with complex problems requiring judicious evaluations and customized surgical plans plus skilled anesthesia, PACU and short-term hospital care. The safety of the patients and their welfare are always our highest priorities. In the end, many lives are changed. In providing deformity correction, we aim to improve function, decrease suffering and ultimately improve the patients' quality of life. It felt great to work on this mission after a four year hiatus and we realize the need for care is higher than ever. For the past several years, unfortunately many have been neglected and many await our return next year. We anticipate a 2024 return with less restrictions, more surgery and even more impact.

Stephen Miller, DPM
Carl Kihm, DPM
Team Co-Leaders
2023