Honduras: A Story of Collaboration

Wampusirpi, in the department of Gracias a Dios in Honduras, has no potable water, no electricity, and no paved roads. It does have a small maternal/infant clinic, led by a dedicated doctor who trained at the Latin America Medical School (ELAM) in Cuba, but until recently it had only one nebulizer in the community for treating asthma, and had run out of syringes. And, due to its location, bringing in medical supplies is challenging, risky, and expensive.

Global Links Program Officer José Henríquez arrived in Gracias a Dios shortly after donations of medical aid from Global Links reached eight small health centers in the region. The 40-foot container traveled to Puerto Cortes on an ocean freighter, and was then transferred to a smaller freighter for the trip down the coast. On reaching Brus Laguna, the container was opened on the ship – at sea, as there is no dock – and the contents unloaded into smaller boats, long and narrow, called *pipantes*. Exam tables, beds, large cabinets and equipment, along with box after box of supplies, were all carefully handed down to the small vessels tied alongside the freighter.

Transport of the sea container from Pittsburgh to Brus Laguna was underwritten by the Honduran Ministry of Health as well as a private grant for support of facilities where ELAM graduates are working. Once the *pipantes* headed inland through the mangrove swamps, however, the municipalities themselves were paying for transport. Every box was precious.

José describes the area as having a “culture of water – whatever they do, they do along the water.” Rivers serve as roadways, and this most recent donation of medical aid traveled in seven or eight narrow *pipantes* for about eight hours to reach Wampusirpi. Once there, the town came out to unload it.

“They were very careful with everything,” José remarked. “I was impressed. Everything was in perfect condition.”

(continued on page 3)
Increasing Capacity for Cardiac Care in Havana

“’You can really see the impact,’ said Program Officer Marisol Valentin after visiting the Institute of Cardiology and Cardiovascular Surgery in Havana, Cuba, in December. “Investing in this hospital has made such a difference.”

The hospital provides cardiology services in the territory of Havana, and is a national reference facility. Toward the end of 2009, it began rebuilding the cardiovascular surgery section with four new state-of-the-art operating rooms and a 32-bed critical care post-surgical patient ward.

At the end of the first phase of construction in 2010, the first two operating rooms were complete, but the new ward could not open because there were no patient recovery beds. After the Ministry of Health advised Global Links of the need, we responded with a donation of 31 hospital beds and mattresses that arrived in June. Thanks to this donation, the ward was opened in November of 2010.

These ICU beds can be more easily adjusted for fragile patients, speeding recovery and increasing patient comfort. In addition, the beds weigh at least 400 pounds apiece. This translates into well over 12,000 pounds of equipment that is highly desirable and yet would have piled up in a landfill in the United States.

In 2011, the cardiology service performed 400 operations, with all patients recovering on beds from Global Links. The hospital expects to add the final two new operating rooms in 2012, with each room handling about 200 operations per year, greatly increasing cardiology services in the country.

Global Links is continuing our long-term commitment to better healthcare in Cuba by working with these dedicated partners on new projects in 2012.

Environmental Impact

In 2011, Global Links recovered over 280 tons of surplus materials from healthcare facilities (hospitals, senior living facilities, and the community). All of these materials would have piled up in landfills in the United States, but were redirected to underserved areas to save lives and improve health.
It would be much easier to provide medical aid only to the big hospitals in Tegucigalpa and other major cities in Honduras, but these rural areas are underserved and in dire need. And the municipalities themselves have clearly demonstrated how invested they are in working with Global Links to improve healthcare resources in their communities.

“Your support shows a high human sensibility,” commented the mayor of Wampusirpi to José. He was amazed at how precisely the donation addressed the community’s needs, having never worked with Global Links before.

If every health center had basic equipment – blood pressure units, baby scales – many health problems could be detected early, before they become complicated and require hospitalization and the disruption of life and family that usually entails.

Global Links will continue to work in the Gracias a Dios department because of the extreme poverty and need, and because providing basic materials in a community such as this pays big dividends in terms of health and dignity.

Now the health institutions of Wampusirpi have four nebulizers – essential for treating the respiratory diseases prevalent in the area. The health centers have new beds, chairs, office equipment, stethoscopes, thermometers, and over 100 boxes of supplies – enough to last almost a year.

The value of this project to the people in these communities was obvious to José. “The poverty in the area is profound,” he remarked, “There are many reasons to despair. But I found reasons for optimism as well. ELAM graduates are committed to helping their own people raise themselves out of poverty and live healthier, better lives. And Global Links is committed to backing their efforts. That’s a great decision. We all have the same goals here.”

Working with dedicated partners is the best way to ensure that projects such as this recent one in Wampusirpi improve healthcare – and life – in the area.
Students Sharpen OR Skills while Providing Essential Service

On certain Monday mornings at Global Links, the main sorting table is piled with intricately fashioned, gleaming stainless steel surgical instruments, all being examined by surgical technology students and faculty from Sanford-Brown Institute.

“Those are vascular clamps . . . those are ear curettes . . . Oh, neuro likes these . . . .” Instructor Donna Grubbs stands over the table. “The students see things here they’ve never seen before, and it helps them with categorizing, especially with the specialty instruments.”

For Global Links, the students are performing a crucial service by identifying and sorting the instruments, as well as other medical materials. “Having these essential tools identified by specialty is so important,” says Medical Outreach Manager Hayley Brugos. “We are grateful when volunteers like the Sanford-Brown team come to share their expertise.”

“We know that life-saving surgeries are cancelled for lack of equipment,” adds Deputy Director Angela Garcia. “Now we can make sure the right instruments are reaching hospitals where they will be most useful. Lives will be saved. And these students will graduate with an awareness of how Global Links works to recover surplus materials and reduce waste. We hope they will become future champions of our programs.”

Supplies Benefit HIV Study in Uganda

Mara Horwitz told Global Links that her Fogarty Study Team at the Kiboga District Hospital in rural Uganda was often low on materials, due to supply chain delays and low stock at the hospital that hosts the clinic. In answer to Mara’s request last fall, Global Links provided gloves, sterile gauze, medical tape, syringes and blood collection tubes for the clinic.

While the focus of the project is to determine if early screening and treatment of tuberculosis and meningitis can improve outcomes for patients beginning antiretroviral therapy for HIV, the clinic also provides inpatient care and other medical services for patients participating in the study.

“All of the supplies are extremely useful,” Mara wrote, “but sterile gauze and syringes have been the most valuable because there is simply no good substitute for them!”
Supporting Community Health in Haiti

Global Links recent projects in Haiti have focused on supporting Haitian graduates of the Latin American School of Medicine, who are dedicated to helping their fellow Haitians. One recent partner is Dr. Douly Caillot – one of the first Haitian doctors to come over with the Cuban Brigade after the 2010 earthquake.

Since then, Dr. Caillot has set up his medical practice and purchased an ambulance, through which he provides free emergency services and health clinics. He is also certified in Community Health Services by the Latin American Medical School through a training program provided in Haiti.

In October, Dr. Caillot asked Global Links to support his ambulance service. He urgently needed a portable ventilator, and thanks to a donation by Butler Memorial Hospital, we were able to provide one. We also provided patient transfer boards, collapsible IV poles, digital thermometers, a blood pressure unit, a fetal Doppler, nebulizers and boxes of medical supplies.

Global Links is proud to support Haitian doctors like Dr. Caillot, who are giving their personal time and money to improve the public health system in Haiti. As a colleague of Dr. Caillot said, “We are of the generation that believes that things can be different and change is possible.”

Suture Reaches Kenyan Hospital in Time for Emergency C-Section

On December 6th, 2011, 23-year-old Elossy was turned away from the local government hospital when she was in active labor because there was a healthcare workers strike.

Elossy then went to Chogoria Hospital, which has been a Suture Program recipient since 1995, and had just received a donation at the end of November. Chogoria normally charges a nominal fee for admission, but Elossy had nothing – no family, and no money.

While Global Links International Medical Aid Program focuses primarily on nine countries in this hemisphere, the Suture Program has a worldwide reach. Suture is light and easily transported, and Global Links can have an enormous impact on the care a hospital provides by donating this one product. To receive sutures from Global Links, hospitals must care for patients who are unable to pay.

“Upon telling her story to our staff, time was of essence,” wrote Dr. George Mwaniki, chief medical officer at Chogoria. “Since she had three previous scars and was contracting, she was immediately admitted into the labor ward and rushed to theatre where she underwent an emergency cesarean section and delivered a handsome baby boy.”

After spending three days in the hospital, Elossy was discharged on December 10th, 2011. Dr. Mwaniki wrote that she had tears in her eyes because they weren’t making her pay anything. “We cannot thank you enough for considering us for your donations; they will go a long way in touching the hearts of the very needy patients with no one else to turn to.”
Imagine going to a hospital and not having sheets on your bed.

Global Links includes linens in most of our shipments, because they are in short supply in the hospitals where we work. We are always looking for more commercial-grade linens from hospitals and hotels. Sheets are not only important for patient comfort, they are essential for basic hygiene. If your facility has surplus linens, please email hbrugos@globallinks.org or call 412.361.3424, ext. 213.