Community Health in Bolivia: Global Links in Action

The baby, a premature newborn, was in respiratory failure. The ventilator at Hospital Daniel Bracamonte, in the department of Potosí, Bolivia, was broken, and the tiny child was being kept alive with an ambu – a manual ventilation device – from Global Links.

“This is one of the most important things you have sent us,” hospital director Dr. Luis Quispe told Global Links that day, holding one of the ambus up to make his point. He was unaware that as he was speaking, an ambu was keeping a newborn alive.

This is a perfect example of Global Links in action. In the United States, hospitals routinely discard clean, unused ambus. In many hospitals in Latin America and the Caribbean, electric ventilators are scarce, and electricity is unreliable. Ambus are essential life-saving supplies, and Global Links includes them in almost every project.

Global Links has been working in Bolivia since 2000. While Bolivia is rich in natural resources and indigenous traditions, it is one of the poorest countries in South America. The indigenous communities, traditionally underserved, have lately been receiving more government support since the new constitution was approved in a referendum in 2009. By directing resources to vulnerable populations, infant and maternal mortality rates are falling, and the number of attended births is approaching the target set by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

One of the ways the government supports the indigenous communities far from the cities of La Paz and Sucre is by building and equipping community hospitals. Providing primary care close to home relieves the population of the need for arduous trips through Bolivia’s challenging terrain.

When a Global Links donation arrives in Bolivia, top government officials – President Evo Morales or highly placed ministers – are generally on hand for the delivery. “Global Links materials came to help critical areas where furnishings were damaged and supplies were nonexistent,” the First Lady of Potosí wrote in a letter to Global Links. “Those areas are now serving patients better and they are grateful for what they have received.”

(continued on page 3)
Safer C-Sections in Guyana

Until recently, if a woman in labor at Georgetown hospital in Guyana required a C-section, she had to be transported across a busy street in all kinds of weather to a separate building, because the labor suite had no functioning operating room. This was an unfortunate trip in the best of circumstances; in emergencies, it could be fatal.

Now, however, new operating rooms near the labor suite make that trip unnecessary.

“This is a huge improvement in healthcare for the women of Guyana,” explains Global Links CEO and co-founder Kathleen Hower. “Georgetown Public is the largest hospital in the country, and the main referral hospital.” The first baby born in the new operating room, on August 3, was this healthy boy weighing close to seven pounds.

Global Links is collaborating with the WONDOOR program at Cleveland’s MacDonald Women’s Hospital, and with the Guyanese Ministry of Health. Donations from Global Links helped make these new ORs a reality.

“The best health service possible” in Ouanaminthe, Haiti

Nurse Wilmine Jean at the CODEVI clinic was extremely happy with the most recent donation from Global Links. “Now we have the ability to perform appropriate gynecologic checkups,” she wrote. “We have a high incidence of respiratory illness, and now we have a suitable treatment with nebulizers. The blood pressure equipment is most useful in our hypertension prevention program.”

CODEVI (Companie Development Industriel) is located in a free-trade zone area between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, on the outskirts of Ouanaminthe, Haiti, with entrances in both countries. The clinic serves more than 6,000 Haitian workers.

“Thanks to your help,” Nurse Jean concluded, “We can provide the best health service possible.”

GLOBAL LINKS NEWSLETTER, FALL 2012
In Riberalta, Bolivia, Global Links collaborated with the Agency for Development of Macro-Regions and Border Areas (ADEMAF is the acronym in Spanish). ADEMAF was formed by the government to expand public services, and extending health coverage has been one of its stated goals. ADEMAF facilitated communication between all the involved parties – local government, health authorities and Global Links – to ensure success.

The Maternal-Infant Hospital of Riberalta is the only hospital for maternal and infant health in the area, and the only one performing C-sections. The Municipal Hospital there serves people from several municipalities in the department of Bení, as well as the adjacent department of Pando, making this 40-bed hospital the main source of healthcare for close to 100,000 people.

Because of Global Links’ successful collaborations, these hospitals are now better equipped to provide healthcare to their communities. In concrete terms, collaboration has meant that when a premature infant in Potosí needed to breathe, an ambu from Global Links was available, and a life was saved.

Life-Saving Sutures Reach Zimbabwe

Global Links has provided approximately 8000 sutures to Nyadire United Methodist Hospital in Zimbabwe since 2005. Still, says Dr. Kasombo Tshiani, the hospital sometimes runs out of sutures and his patients must seek treatment in the large urban hospitals of Harare – if they can travel over two hours by car, and if they can afford the surgery. Often, neither of those requirements can be met.

Nyadire provides medical care to those unable to pay, and Global Links is proud to support this work with donations of sutures and other materials, which have been carried to Nyadire by members of the Pittsburgh-based Nyadire Connection. Dr. Tshiani was in Pittsburgh recently, and received over 800 sutures to take back to Zimbabwe, along with valuable instruments for orthopedic surgery.

While at Global Links, Dr. Tshiani stressed the value of the donated sutures, and told us of a young mother who arrived at Nyadire after going through labor at home and rupturing her uterus. This medical emergency could only be resolved with a hysterectomy, which Dr. Tshiani performed with sutures recently received from Global Links.

When time is short – as in this case – travel to another hospital can be fatal. Luckily, Nyadire had the supplies necessary to operate on this young mother, who survived to care for her two-year-old child at home.
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How Can You Get Involved?

• Commit to a regular volunteer shift two to four times a month, converting our region’s surplus into life-saving donations. Visit our website for details and an application.

• If you are a medical professional, share your expertise in identifying medical materials.

• Host a baby shower in support of maternal infant health.
  – Ask guests to bring items for our New Baby bags - download a list from our website.
  – Choose from our New Baby registry at Target.com.
  – Sponsor the cost of shipping bags to resource-poor communities – $500 allows us to ship 50 baby bags to encourage prenatal care and attended deliveries.

• Promote our work via social media – our Nebulizer Collection, Scrub Collection and New Baby Collection are all easy to participate in from anywhere in the US.

• Sponsor a breathing station – $200 enables Global Links to provide a community asthma treatment station.

• Improve children’s health – $600 enables Global Links to provide a child wellness kit containing a scale, oto-ophthalmoscope, and other materials.

• Improve emergency care - $2500 enables Global Links to provide two stretchers, furnishings and ten boxes of supplies for a small emergency room.

For more information about these and other ideas, visit our website and see Get Involved. Please email Stacy Bodow at sbodow@globallinks.org before getting started.

Stay Connected

GLOBAL LINKS NEWSLETTER, FALL 2012
Global Links Concludes Dialysis Project in Jamaica

Global Links is concluding a multi-year project that began in 2005 to improve treatment of kidney failure in Jamaica.

Working with the National Renal Health Program, Global Links provided key dialysis training and materials, first at the University of the West Indies and then at dialysis units at St. Joseph and Mandeville Hospitals. In 2010, Global Links began the latest part of the project, supporting a new dialysis unit in Mandeville Hospital. This new unit provides dialysis services for the population in Central Jamaica, who previously had no recourse other than traveling almost two hours to Kingston for the twice weekly treatments that kept them alive.

The most recent donation from Global Links included an ultrasound machine to facilitate the placement of fistulas, which provide access to the bloodstream necessary for long-term dialysis. “This was the final piece,” says Global Links CEO Kathleen Hower. “Having an ultrasound available for fistula placement gives much better results. We made sure a training program for the surgeons was in place, as well as a program for nurses to maintain the fistulas for their patients. Because the ultrasound is portable, it can be used in both Mandeville and in other hospitals.”

Kidney transplants are rare in Jamaica, where an estimated 600 people die of kidney failure every year. With the completion of this part of the project at Mandeville, more people will have easier and better renal care closer to home.

This project was supported by a generous grant from the ALCOA Foundation.

Medical Supplies for Uganda

“You definitely made a positive impact on the health of 64 children who have been affected seriously by HIV/AIDS, poverty, conflict and abandonment,” wrote Pauline Greenlick, Treasurer of Bright Kids Uganda. Global Links provided medical supplies – bandages, gauze, gloves, thermometers, syringes – supplies that Global Links volunteers pack by the thousands for clinics just like this one in Entebbe. “The blood pressure cuff and stethoscope were also very much appreciated and needed as they are very expensive to purchase in Uganda,” Greenlick’s letter continued.

The letter concluded, “On behalf of the 64 Bright Kids children who now have access to health care, medications and health support, I send you their thanks as well.” Global Links shares the thanks with our volunteers, whose efforts made those materials available. We can only do our part because they so willingly do theirs.
Global Links’ New Home

Expanding Our Mission of Sharing Surplus and Saving Lives

Over the last 23 years, Global Links has had a direct and dramatic impact on human life and health. The scope of our services and the volume of critically needed medical supplies we have provided to resource-poor communities have grown rapidly, but the need continues to grow, and there is much more to be done. In order to expand our operations, Global Links has begun the process of moving to a new location.

The new building will enable us to increase our efficiency by having the distribution center, volunteer facility and offices all under one roof. We can welcome more volunteers, and provide a beautiful new space to work in. We can also increase the amount of supplies and equipment we can accept, which translates into more tractor-trailers full of medical surplus for our partner hospitals around the world – and lives saved.