

My week with Hearts in Motion

1/4/19: Today we flew from Philadelphia to Houston and from there to Guatemala City, the country's capitol. There we met physical therapy students and faculty from William Carey and Marquette Universities, forming a group of 22 students and 4 professors for the week. At the airport we loaded our luggage into the back of a pickup truck and took two vans from Guatemala City to Zacapa. Along the way we learned about the rules of the road in Guatemala: 1) there are no speed limits, 2) you can fit five people on a motorcycle, 3) helmets and shoes are a rare, 4) three honks means "hello", four honks is way less friendly, 5) two traffic lanes can also be three, or four, or even five traffic lanes. Despite this, the ride, as well as most others throughout the week, was beautiful. We passed mountains, valleys, and farms constantly. After five hours on the road we arrived at Hotel Atlántico where we stayed for the remainder of our time in Zacapa.



1/5/19: For our first day working with patients, we woke up early to make the drive to Morales, where we created a pop-up clinic in a local gymnasium. We split up into groups of 3 or 4 students and worked until 5pm, seeing more than 60 patients total. I was the only first year student in my group but was also the only one that could speak Spanish, so we balanced the older students' knowledge with my ability to communicate and the results were awesome. Throughout the day we gave many patients sneakers (most women in Guatemala only wear flip flops) and it was amazing to see patients strut off in their new shoes with wide smiles and hope for decreased pain and/or increased function in the future.



1/6/19: Day two of treatment led us to Pueblo Modelo, a plot of land set aside by the government for families displaced following mudslides and earthquakes years ago. Now there are 5,000 people living on this property and many of them are third generation residents. Most patients we saw here had never seen a doctor, lived with no electricity or running water, and were in poor overall health. Despite all of this they expressed such optimism and gratitude for our presence. We setup four therapy tables in an old stable, opened the doors, and were quickly flooded with patients and their families. This site provided us with a lot of challenges as we had limited supplies for patients with medical problems that had gone untreated for years. In the end, it was neat to have such variety, and the work was extremely rewarding. We treated about 50 patients then headed to a local shop for empanadas before heading to our hotel and spending some time doing group reflection.



1/7/19: We spent today in Morazán at a rehabilitation clinic treating just over 30 patients. Some of these patients had received physical therapy in the past, so it was neat to work with people that had success in the past and were real believers in the benefits therapy can offer. We also got to meet a Mayan woman who was 102 years old which was extremely impressive, especially having heard about her living conditions. After leaving the clinic we stopped at a local cemetery with great views of the village and then walked around a waterfall which attracts locals and tourists for swimming on the weekends.



1/8/19: For the first time, we split the group into two today with half going to a Hearts in Motion clinic in Zacapa while the other half, including myself, went to a pop-up clinic in Huité. This was the first time I got to treat a pediatric patient and it was amazing to see how receptive his family was to the home exercise plan we created. Huité itself was my favorite of the communities we worked in; almost every patient there made sure to hug and kiss each of us, offering a "Dios bendiga" (God bless you) before leaving. When school let out for the day a big group of middle school students came just to watch us work and was even asking questions about the treatments being done.



1/9/19: Today we split into two groups again with half the group going to Olopa for a pop-up clinic and half of us staying in Zacapa at the Kevin O'Halloran Rehabilitation Clinic. It was neat to see what a standard outpatient clinic looks like there and to have more tools available throughout the day. I spent most of the morning treating children and ended my day helping a gunshot victim relearn how to walk and stand without braces. This was my most memorable and rewarding patient and I will draw inspiration from his determination for years to come.



1/10/19: Sadly, this was our last day working with patients. Each college went to a different location within Gualán- Marquette worked at an orphanage, William Carey visited a senior citizen center, and the Scranton crew went to a medical clinic called Puesto de Salud. From there, we all met at a nutrition center for malnourished children. We fed 100 kids lunch, played baseball and soccer with them, got a musical performance by some of the students, and then treated a few community members using the nutrition center's therapy rooms. By this point in the week I developed great friendships with students from the other schools, but it was fun to work with my Scranton peers, many of which I have looked up to on campus for the last few years.



1/11/19: Today we rose before the sun to leave Zacapa for a more touristy spot- Antigua. We got to spend time exploring the city and even went zip-lining over a coffee plantation. The views were unreal, and it was great to have time to wander through the beautiful parts of Guatemala we had all heard so much about. After an authentic dinner (including some karaoke by our professors) we went salsa dancing and met with a University of Scranton alumni who started his own service organization, Move Together, to provide physical therapy in Guatemala.



1/12/19: We began our last full day with a hike at Parque Nacional Volcan de Pacaya. We hiked the active volcano, Pacaya, and from there we could see three other volcanos as well as miles of farmland. When we reached the top, we roasted marshmallows over the hot rocks and stopped to enjoy the view. Later in the afternoon we walked through the markets in Antigua and admired the many old churches and government buildings from colonial days.



1/13/19: We headed back to Philadelphia via Houston and were reunited with loved ones. Everyone's parents were relieved to have us back on American soil safe and sound and we were all excited to go home for hot showers!