

LA CLINICA EMPLOYEE JOINS VOLUNTEERS IN NICARAGUA

By Daniel Fenyvesi

At the end of March I traveled to Ometepe, Nicaragua with Natural Doctors International (NDI - www.ndimed.org). NDI was founded in 2003 by Tabatha Parker, a doctor inspired by the ability of natural medicine to improve the lives of those in impoverished communities. NDI teaches North Americans about healthcare in a third world setting using both traditional lectures/discussions as well as a 40hr work week of seeing patients in rural clinics. NDI takes volunteers of many stripes – doctors, nurses, nutritionists, and acupuncturists though the majority of participants are NDs -Naturopathic doctors/ students. NDs practice in the US, Canada and Europe, they can prescribe medication and perform minor surgeries though they prefer other modalities: changes in nutrition, supplements, herbal remedies, and physical therapy/massage.

NDI offered a rich setting to meet and understand the lives of the rural poor and the challenges they face. The island of Ometepe is beautiful: two volcanoes attached by a narrow isthmus. Our volunteer group stayed in Los Angeles, a small town near the live volcano Concepción. The first day, I met my homestay family who accepted me into their home as a close friend, cooking typical meals such as gallo pinto (fried rice and beans) and peppering me with questions about my job and family in the states.



Daniel Fenyvesi, Nutritionist II, showing the surgery supply table: iodine and soap in old soda bottles

Most families on the island farm tobacco, plantains, beans, and corn. A typical salary is 20 cordobas a day, equivalent to a dollar, making everyday items such as toilet paper, phones, and books a luxury. In five days, we visited four clinics on the island. Medical supplies are minimal, gloves are cleaned and reused till they fall apart, fecal samples are collected in matchboxes and urine in old soda bottles. Our group of 14 volunteers saw 267 patients, and donated a total of \$13,817 worth of medical supplies, a portion of which came from La Clínica (thank you to Scott

Taylor, Lonny Shavelson, Maryann Jensen and Robyn Size).

I worked one-on-one translating for naturopathic students and doctors. Some common medical conditions included: allergies, anemia, asthma, kidney stones/ infections, diarrhea/digestive complications, bronchitis, high blood pressure, diabetes, urinary tract infections, pain/muscular/ skeletal, and a variety of skin issues: rashes, scabies & infections. Occasionally pharmaceutical drugs were used but more often than not more natural remedies were employed. For example, for anemia, Jarabe de Carao (syrup made from a local fruit), for Bronchitis Jarabe de Liptomiel (eucalyptus and other herbs in a honey solution), for blood pressure Strauss's heart drops (mixture of herbs), garlic, and hawthorn.

The challenging life of the islanders can be seen in their rapid aging. A typical 50-year-old woman appears at least 65 with cloudy eyes, heavily wrinkled skin (partly from cooking with wood fires) missing teeth, bent back and stooped shoulders. NDI is a 501c3 registered non-profit. Medical brigades, such as the one I joined occur bi-monthly, and volunteers are welcome year round. I highly recommend this inspirational experience for any healthcare worker. If you have any questions please email me at dfenyvesi@hotmail.com.