

Pharm Fresh: A New Perspective from the Mission Field

By Steffanie Powell, Ariel Richardson, and Zach Ziner, PharmD. Class of 2016, Palm Beach Atlantic University



P4 student Tosin David counseling a patient on discharge from the clinic.

A team from the Lloyd L. Gregory School of Pharmacy traveled to Honduras in May 2015 on a medical mission trip, where they partnered with Global Partnership Initiative as well as local missionaries and doctors. The team consisted of five alumni, 17 pharmacy students, one faculty member, and a team coordinator. Over the course of ten days, the team was able to serve 848 patients providing them with medical treatment, as well as spreading the Gospel. The team flew to San Pedro Sula, spent five days in Siguatepeque, traveled to Santa Barbara, then spent the remainder of the trip in Santa Cruz De Yojoa. The team set up six clinics at various churches, clinic sites, and a school.

We served a majority of mothers and children who suffered from allergy symptoms consisting of dry eyes, runny nose, and congestion. These symptoms were primarily caused by the dry, dusty conditions from the lack of rain, as well as the burning of trash and wildfires. When the team traveled up into the mountains to a little town called La Cuesta, they served patients, including the elderly, who had traveled miles by foot to receive medical treatment. This was eye opening for the team members to realize that something as simple as access to medical care becomes an extremely difficult task in a foreign country. Their closest hospital or doctors were miles down in the valley; and for many, that is not even an option due to their lack of transportation. One patient whom the team was able to help mentioned that this was the first time in 40 years that he received antiparasitic medication. He was

extremely grateful for our willingness to help his village. The gratitude seen in the patients we served was truly rewarding for the team.

Stephanie's Story

The three of us had the opportunity to be a part of this team as fourth-year rotation students, in which we were more involved with the behind the scenes planning and organizing of the trip. God worked in and through each of our lives during our time in Honduras, and we would like to share our most memorable experiences.

On the third day of our trip we held clinic at Emmanuel Baptist, a church in Siguatepeque pastored by Melvin Romero. I was assigned to work in the triage part of our clinic, taking patients' blood pressure and blood glucose. I remember one particular woman who came to the clinic: she was very happy and had a huge smile on her face. You could tell she was very grateful for the care we were offering her. While checking her in, her blood pressure was noted to be 220/140 mmHg and her blood glucose was over 300 mg/dL. I didn't want to alarm the patient so I calmly got one of our team's translators to ask the patient more questions. The translator inquired if she had eaten anything that morning, if she had walked a long distance to come to the clinic, if she had a history of high blood glucose or blood pressure, and if she was having any other symptoms. She explained to the translator that she had been experiencing chest pain in the right side of her chest when she woke up in the morning. I quickly informed one of the Honduran physicians, Dr. Karina Aguilar, and the patient was immediately taken to the hospital. While the patient was waiting for the hospital transport, her demeanor had clearly changed from when she first came into triage. Back then, she was very happy... but now I could see the worry and fear in her eyes and facial expressions. I asked the patient if she would like us to pray with her, and she said yes. I asked the whole triage

team to come over, and we laid hands on the patient and prayed for her safety and healing. After the prayer, you could see she wasn't as scared, and we all hugged her and assured her that God would be there for her. As it states in Isaiah 41:10 (NIV), "do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." You could see that God was lifting the burden of fear from the patient.

I am so blessed to have had the opportunity to serve in Honduras this year and will be forever grateful. Many lives were touched as our team ministered to many people, and this has forever changed my life. I am truly blessed to have met each and every person on this trip whether it was a patient or one of our team members. Each person impacted my life in a way that I did not think was possible. This trip was life changing, and I seek to apply the lessons and experiences to my daily life as I continue to grow in my faith with Christ.

Although I have been on several mission trips in the past, this was my first medical missions trip; and I can truly say my life was forever impacted by my experiences in Honduras. One of the most profound aspects of the trip was the opportunity to pray with patients after we counseled them on their medications. I had numerous eye-opening experiences in those times of prayer. During my first session of working in the counseling station, I asked one of our patients if it was okay for me to pray in English. She looked at me, smiled, and said in Spanish, "God knows our prayers." It was such a special moment to realize that despite the language and culture barriers, we were praying to the same loving and gracious Father! Throughout the different clinics, it was common for patients to pray out loud as I prayed over them. Although I could not understand everything they were saying, I knew that they were praising and thanking our Father. There were several times during prayer sessions when I could truly feel the Holy Spirit's presence in our small counseling room. It was so special to be praying out loud in two different languages by two people who barely knew anything about each other. I believe this pleases God to see His children praying together.

Ariel's Story

I believe this pleases God to see His children praying together.

During another session, I was praying for a sweet, beautiful lady; and when I had finished praying, she told the translator that she had been praying for me during the prayer time. It touched my heart to see a fellow sister in Christ – who did not know me just minutes before – praying for my life. This expanded my perspective on the family of Christ, for no matter where we are in the world, we are sons and daughters of the King. It truly brought to life Galatians 3:26 (NIV), “so in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” Each person is God’s precious child, and He loves us all the same. Viewing the people and patients we interact with as God’s children changes your outlook regarding other people and transforms the way you desire to treat and serve others.

In addition, I was amazed at the pure joy most people contained. To see the faces of little children light up after receiving a new toothbrush was touching. Personally, I have always viewed a toothbrush as a common necessity that was part of daily living; however, in Honduras, even the ability to afford a toothbrush is difficult. The families were so grateful to receive something as simple as a toothbrush, and this truly caused me to reevaluate my perspective on life. I desire to be so content in the joy of the Lord and remain grateful for even the smallest things in my life. One story that stands out in my mind was during our last clinic day. After I had finished counseling and praying with a family, the mother sent her three sweet kids over to the other side of my desk to give me a hug. I received three huge hugs and whispers of “gracias” in my ear. My heart was overwhelmed and humbled to be blessed with the opportunity to minister to these patients.

Overall, I learned the importance of having compassion in our daily lives, especially during our interactions with patients. Often the demands of the workplace and the overwhelming stresses that build up can prevent us from truly devoting time to our patients. Often we are bombarded with obstacles that prevent us from being able to minister in given situations. One member from our team mentioned this during our trip: “obstacles are just opportunities, divine appointments, to be able to minister and share God’s light.” Displaying compassion to our patients often goes much farther than the medical treatments we can provide, but it requires our willingness to sacrifice our time

and energy and to invest in their lives. My desire is to take the experiences and lessons that I learned in Honduras and apply them to my future career as a pharmacist.

Zach’s Story

This was my second mission trip, but my first medical mission trip. You can imagine the overwhelming feeling that I experienced on the first clinic day when we arrived to see people lined up already at eight in the morning. After jumping right in with calculations, blood pressure monitoring, glucose readings, and counseling, I started acclimating to the routine; and by the last day I felt like a pro, using all I had learned in pharmacy school. The only thing that I was not prepared for – nor will I ever fully comprehend – is the momentous need for health care. I remember hearing an 82 year old patient explain how she had walked several kilometers up and down hills just to get to our clinic. I heard another story of a mother who brought her sick baby boy to the clinic at four in the morning just so he could be seen.

There are countless other stories of patients living with debilitating medical conditions who were unable to afford their medications or surgeries. The story that resonates with me the most is that of a six month old girl who had been hospitalized for the previous two months. She was being treated for anemia, poor nutritional status, and low weight. Her mother presented her to our clinic with a severe fungal infection on the back of her head and the inside of her legs. Her mother said that she had this infection in the hospital, but the doctors would not treat it because she could not pay for it. In Honduras, doctors give the patient a written prescription for the medication, and the patient or a family member obtains the medication from the pharmacy and then brings it back to the hospital so the doctors can administer it. This broke my heart. I was joyful that we were able to help this mother and her baby daughter, but it made me wonder how many more stories are like this one.

One thing I can truthfully say is that we intervened and impacted 848 lives in Honduras. The biggest difference that we made was to offer the gift of Christ to all of the patients we encountered. We were able to share the gospel and pray with the patients. We dispersed over 150 Bibles. We laid groundwork for the evangelism teams to go

back and help them grow in their faith. This is where my joy is derived from. We were able to follow the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV), “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” However, there is still more work to be done. As I stated before, we were able to reach 848 people in six clinic days, but that is miniscule compared to the number of people who call Honduras home, not to speak of those around the world who need proper medical care and need to be shown the love of Christ. My prayer is that each and every one of them can be reached, and that the Lord will use me when and where He deems fit.

The team all took away many memorable experiences from their time in Honduras. When the team was asked what they learned from the trip, the answer we heard repeatedly was “to be more grateful.” Numerous team members mentioned how the gratefulness seen in these patients’ lives transformed the hearts of all involved. These people had so little, yet when they received something as simple as a toothbrush, toothpaste, vitamins, reading glasses, or a thirty day supply of medications, they were beyond thankful. Patients continually told team members how thankful they were to see the team and how much it meant to receive medical help. This was eye-opening to the team, because it revealed how much Americans take for granted, such as receiving proper nutrition, seeing a physician when we are in need, and obtaining medications. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV) Paul says, “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” God desires for us to live with a heart of thanksgiving – not just for His sake, but also for our own. When our lives are founded on thanksgiving, our outlook is transformed and others are able to see the light of Christ through us. Overall, our hope is that we will not lose sight of the experiences we encountered while in Honduras, and that we will apply the Honduran attitude of gratefulness to our daily lives and future careers.

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10: 45 (NIV)