



SOLIDARITYBRIDGE
Healing & Empowering in Latin America

REPORT

31st MEDICAL MISSION TRIP

Tarija, Bolivia

May 13th - May 20th, 2011



*Dr. Mark Ottolin revisits Tarija to work with
Dr. Ivar Donoso at the Instituto Cardiovascular*

Recently, our small US team journeyed to Tarija, Bolivia, for a follow-up visit after a similar team made their first trip in July, 2010. At that time we established a year-round program making expensive pacemaker surgeries available to Bolivians most in need. We returned this year to evaluate the effectiveness of this program and further teach and equip our Bolivian pacemaker partners in Tarija. The region surrounding Tarija has a particularly high incidence of Chagas so we're especially eager to grow our program there.

Upon our arrival at the Instituto Cardiovascular we were warmly received by the lead cardiologist, Dr. Ivar Donoso. Dr. Donoso worked closely with us last year and expressed delight when he saw two returning missionaries, Dr. Mark Ottolin, our U.S. cardiologist, and Carlos Laserna, our Bolivian director of our Cochabamba office. Rounding out our U.S. mission team was Ann Rhomberg, trip coordinator, and two pacemaker specialists, Bobby Carey and Michelle Arsonault.

As the week unfolded, we partnered with Dr. Donoso and his team to implant 8 pacemakers and to perform 3 angiograms, 1 with angioplasty. Another significant aspect of our week related to teaching. Our pacemaker specialists, Bobby and Michelle, spent time with the Instituto staff to further explain the intricate features of the pacemaker programmer. The programmer assesses the battery life and prescribed performance of an implanted pacemaker for each patient. This is vital to the ongoing care of the people who have received pacemakers.



Michelle Arsenault, Pacemaker Specialist from Medtronic Corp, provides more training on the pacemaker programmer

Our mission week concluded with a closing reception with our patients. We used a large screen TV to show them our 14 minute documentary film which features a patient in Tarija who received her pacemaker from Solidarity Bridge last year. (This film is now posted on our website.) We also extended blessings upon each other, enjoyed refreshments and exchanged many hugs!

Prior to our departure, we left \$773,950 worth of pacemaker supplies which were then distributed to our programs in Tarija, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

Dr. Donoso and his staff have the capacity to provide pacemaker services on a monthly basis to many more impoverished patients. We will continue working with them as they heighten their community outreach efforts to ensure those most in need are receiving pacemaker services.

Patient Story

Our first patient came to us rather dramatically. Within the first hour of the first morning at our worksite, 62 year old Elena Perez was sitting in the crowded lobby awaiting her Chagas evaluation when the social worker burst into our surgical lounge shouting, "Come, Come, Come!" Within moments, Dr. Ivar Donoso was giving Elena CPR on the floor while Solidarity Bridge's Dr. Mark Ottolin and pacemaker specialist Bobby Carey sprinted down the hallway to locate a gurney. Soon after, Dr. Ottolin and Dr. Donoso stabilized Elena. The extra hands of our mission team enabled the rapid response that allowed Elena to regain consciousness from her cardiac arrest and receive a pacemaker that afternoon.



Elena Perez departing for home after her surgery

"I truly thank you from the heart for what you have done for me: I'm back to life!" exclaimed Elena. Two days later, Elena went home with her husband Juan.

Elena had a small grocery store in her hometown, Villa Charcas, approximately 12 hours from the large city of Tarija. Two years ago she was diagnosed with Chagas Disease and moved to Tarija to be closer to medical care and to her four adult children. At that time she was able to resume light work in a small market stall while Juan got a job as an assistant mason in construction. With their meager earnings, the pacemaker surgery Elena needed was completely beyond their means. A few months ago, Elena had to give up her stall due to extreme fatigue and swollen legs. This reduced the family income and caused her to feel depressed.

With her new pacemaker, Elena already feels better. She is looking forward to working again and spending more time with her family. The look of intense worry on Juan's face has been transformed into that of hope. Their youngest daughter Lizeth (22) said with tears in her eyes, "We are so grateful for the help we received." Doña Elena added: "I cannot thank you enough... it's a dream come true. We know that God protects us."