



## Gynecologic Surgery Mission Trip

Sucre, Bolivia

23-29 October 2022



### I. INTRODUCTION

The Instituto Chuquisaqueño de Oncología (ICO) is a public hospital established in 2015 in the Bolivian capital city of Sucre to provide specialized care for patients in the southern region of the country with cancer and other complex conditions. The hospital was founded and built over time by a committed group of young doctors with ties in the region. From the beginning, the ICO founders reached out to the Cochabamba headquarters of Puente de Solidaridad (PdS) for material support to outfit and stock the fledgling hospital. Soon after they completed construction of the first operating room, the hospital invited PdS to organize a Solidarity Bridge (SB) mission trip to provide specialized surgical training. The first SB mission trip to the ICO took place in October 2018. Various circumstances, including the Covid pandemic, prevented another team from visiting the hospital for the following three years.

In 2022, the ICO leadership again reached out to PdS to request specialized training through a Solidarity Bridge mission trip, this time focused on laparoscopic techniques to treat gynecologic cancers and other complex illnesses of the female reproductive system. Solidarity Bridge assembled a team composed of gynecologic oncologist Dr. Erin Stevens, RN Jessica Waldo, and photographer and supplies assistant Deborah Winarski. Staff participants included PdS Executive Director Patricia Vargas, social worker Marizol Mamani, Megan Kennedy-Farrell providing team and patient accompaniment, and Jodi Grahl as trip leader. Three volunteer Bolivian interpreters rounded out the team.

## II. GOALS

- Establish a mutually-nourishing relationship between the ICO team and U.S. surgical specialists for ongoing peer-to-peer support.
- Provide training for ICO gynecologic surgery team members (gynecologists, anesthesiologists and nurses) in laparoscopic surgery.
- Ensure that the ICO gynecologic surgery team has access to the necessary equipment and supplies to continue to provide safe laparoscopic surgery.
- Develop a plan for future training, equipping, and other areas of support to continue to expand diagnostic and treatment capacities of the ICO team.



## III. SUMMARY of ACTIVITIES

### Preparations

The mission trip was preceded by months of preparation between Solidarity Bridge, Puente de Solidaridad, and the ICO hospital. The ICO physicians selected and prepared patients for surgery during the mission visit, and presented the cases for review and discussion over Zoom prior to the arrival of the US team. Dr. Stevens drafted a list of recommended supplies for the identified cases, and items unavailable at the ICO were procured from the Puente de Solidaridad warehouse in Cochabamba, through the mission team members themselves, from U.S. donor organization, or by purchasing.

Prior to travel, the U.S. team also completed a two-month course to prepare medically, culturally, ethically and logistically for the trip.

### Arrival in Sucre

Visiting SB and PdS team members arrived in Sucre the morning of Sunday, October 23. That evening, they gathered with their ICO hosts to celebrate an opening ritual and group dinner. On Monday, the joint team re-evaluated each of the pre-selected patients before finalizing the surgical schedule. A new patient was also evaluated and added to the schedule. The pathologies assessed included cervical dysplasia (pre-cancerous cell changes that may lead to cervical cancer), endometrial hyperplasia (which may lead to endometrial or uterine cancer), complex ovarian cysts, and suspected ovarian cancer. Patients ranged in age from 30 to 58.

### Surgeries

The joint Bolivian-U.S. team performed seven complex surgeries over the course of four days. The procedures included hysterectomies, oophorectomies, and an abdominal tumor resection, accompanied by biopsies as appropriate. The team performed six of the seven surgeries laparoscopically, with the ICO team progressively taking the lead in the procedures. The Bolivian team performed the final surgery mentored but unassisted by Dr. Stevens, demonstrating command of the essential laparoscopic skills. Each of the patients operated laparoscopically was discharged the day following their surgery.

The seventh surgery required an open procedure to remove a large abdominal tumor. In consideration of the patient's residence in a remote settlement without close access to care, she remained in the hospital six days after her surgery to allow her to heal and regain her strength prior to discharge.

### **Equipment and supply support**

Over the course of the week, the joint team assessed the existing assets of the ICO operating theater to identify gaps in equipment and supplies. Upon conclusion of the mission, PdS, SB, and the mission team donated to the ICO a selection of surgical instruments, patient positioning equipment, and other materials. We are especially grateful to MAP International and Americares Medical Outreach for the donation of key supplies for this mission. Dr. Erin Stevens also delivered a 40-piece set of general surgery instruments and five portable pulse oximeters donated through the Americares Safe Surgery Initiative.

The U.S. team also carried supplies for use in our year-round surgical programs. The total value of supplies delivered is U\$101,732.

### **Follow-up and next steps**

The ICO physicians continue to provide all needed follow-up care for the patients. Each of the seven women has recovered well with no complications reported as of this report. Upon conclusion of the visit, the ICO Director invited the visiting team to return in 2023 to assist the ICO surgical team to continue to expand its laparoscopic surgery skills.

## **IV. MISSION TEAM & HOSPITAL PARTNERS**

### **Solidarity Bridge/ Puente de Solidaridad team:**

Patricia Vargas, PdS Executive Director

Marizol Mamani, PdS Social Worker

Jodi Grahl, Director SB Gynecologic Surgery Program

Megan Kennedy-Farrell, SB Senior Director of Mission and Identity

Dr. Erin Stevens, Gynecologic Oncologist

RN Jessica Waldo, Surgical Nurse

Deborah Winarski, photographer and medical supplies assistant

Dr. Luciana Rasguido, volunteer interpreter

Dr. Eduardo Buzolic, volunteer interpreter

Fernanda Calbimonte, volunteer interpreter

### **ICO surgical team:**

Dr. Isabel Huaygua, Chief of Gynecologic Surgery Service

Dr. Isabel Quinteros, Gynecologist

Dr. Beatriz Ballesteros, Gynecologist

Dr. Paola Reyes, Gynecologist

Dr. María Eugenia Villarroel, Anesthesiologist

Dr. Adriana Bedoya, Anesthesiologist

Valencia Gallardo, Circulating nurse

... and all the ICO nurses, doctors and staff.





Special thanks to our hosts at the Instituto Chuquisaqueño de Oncología under the leadership of its Director, Dr. Wilfredo Campos. We are particularly grateful to ICO gynecologic oncologist Dr. Tatiana Mina who led the host team's preparations until her maternity leave beginning shortly before our arrival. Additional key contributors to the success of the surgeries include the pathology department technicians, cleaning and maintenance personnel, social workers, and other dedicated professionals and auxiliary staff who form part of the ICO family.

Over the course of the week, we were blessed to spend time with the patients and their families while accompanying them through the surgery process. We are grateful to each of the patients for entrusting our joint team with their care.

