

SOLIDARITY BRIDGE

Multi-Specialty Mission Trip
September 23 – October 1, 2022
Cliza, Bolivia



I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, our multi-specialty teams have been focused on bringing clinical specialties and surgical care to communities in Bolivia who otherwise lack access to such services. This year our team of six US participants partnered with medical professionals at the Hospital Materno Infantil San Juan de Dios, a Level II hospital in Cliza, Bolivia, situated 30 miles southeast of Cochabamba. Our sister organization in Bolivia, Puente de Solidaridad, selected the hospital site based on their requests for support and their committed partnership to our programs intended to service the most vulnerable patients. We are grateful to Puente de Solidaridad for their strong pre-planning leadership, in-country orientation, and hearty accompaniment throughout this collaboration.

II. MISSION GOALS

- A. Provide specialty-care to low-income patients in partnership with the Bolivian medical community
- B. Exchange knowledge and skills with hospital partners
- C. Donate medical supplies to local partners who serve low-income patients
- D. Offer all participants experiences of inter-cultural encounter and personal growth

III. MEETING OUR GOALS

- A. **Provide specialty care to low-income patients in partnership with the Bolivian medical community.**



The US physicians worked alongside their Bolivian counterparts to treat 199 patients in specialty clinics in cardiology, gynecology and family medicine.

Patients who needed gynecologic surgeries were identified by Bolivian physicians in advance of our arrival. These partners and Solidarity Bridge surgeon, Dr. Ellen Eye, then performed final joint assessment in clinic. Dr. Eye later partnered with Bolivian surgeons, Dr. Jose Choque and Dr. Jaime Vallejos, to offer laparoscopic surgery to four patients with pathologies related to ovarian cysts and fibroids. Special thanks to our surgical nurse Geetha Chandrasekar, who with the help of language interpreter, Nicole Fuentes, nimbly fulfilled various nursing roles throughout the hospital when not involved in surgeries.

B. Donate medical supplies to local partners who serve low-income patients.

Our luggage contained medical supplies and instruments that were either used throughout the mission week or donated to Puente de Solidaridad for use in our year-round programs or distribution to other hospitals. The materials had an estimated value of \$136,877. Cliza Hospital Director, Dr. Jose Ortega, was especially grateful for the high value surgical instruments and pulse oximeters, donated by Americares.

C. Exchange knowledge and skills with hospital partners

The Solidarity Bridge physicians worked alongside their Bolivian counterparts (physicians, medical students and interns) sharing diagnostic methods and together creating treatment plans. This made for bi-directional hands-on learning.

Additionally, three requested lectures were offered in a classroom setting:

- Diagnosis and Treatment of Heart Pathologies – Mark Ottolin, MD
- Gynecology Procedures for Clinic Patients – Ellen Eye, MD
- Diagnosis and Treatment of Diabetes – Jana Mohan, MD

D. Offer all participants an experience of inter-cultural encounter and personal growth

Many weeks prior to departure, Solidarity Bridge began preparing US participants for their mission experience through in-depth logistical and cultural orientation. Upon arrival, the team walked the streets of Cliza and nearby communities, acknowledging that immersion into the local community invites a sense of solidarity with those we serve at the hospital. We then gathered for an opening ritual and met regularly throughout the week to reflect on the significance of these experiences in our work with patients and in our own interior lives.



IV. PATIENT STORY

Joselin is a 29-year old woman who was diagnosed with a tumor called a teratoma. While these tumors are benign, they can become very large and affect fertility. Fortunately, Dr. Ellen Eye and Dr. Jose Choque successfully removed the mass* laparoscopically and her recovery was relatively quick. Avoiding an open-incision surgery was especially important because Joselin and her mother support their family by growing corn, and she couldn't afford to take much time away from tending the fields.

Two days before her surgery, Joselin welcomed the Puente de Solidaridad social worker, Marizol Mamani, and our surgical team into her home. She explained that her pain, persisting over many years, became increasingly difficult and her farm work became unbearable. She knew she needed surgery but the cost, added to other family expenses, seemed to put the procedure out of reach. A short time later, through the outreach of Marizol, she learned that our mission team was coming to Cliza and could offer her surgery at a lower cost. She told us that when she learned she would receive this needed surgery, she "felt so happy and glad." She went on to affirm, "I believe only God could bring this solution and you here."



In turn, those of us visiting Joselin felt truly honored to have a role in her healing.

* The mass was later diagnosed in surgery as a large pedunculated uterine fibroid.

V. CONCLUSION and NEXT STEPS

Our Multi-Specialty Mission Team contributed to the wellbeing of low-income Bolivian patients while also engaging in medical education exchanges and resourcing Bolivian professionals with surgical instruments and other supplies. Of equal importance, our team will bring their learnings to their individual lives here. We sincerely thank our partners at Puente de Solidaridad and the Cliza Hospital for their leadership in making this mission effort possible. Together, we will assess future collaborations.

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VI. OUR TEAM

Embracing a spirit of solidarity is central to all of our work. We are grounded in the vision that we are part of one human family and, in that oneness, our individual skills and resources come to bear light for our world.

Puente de Solidaridad Team:

Patricia Vargas, Executive Director
Marcela Canedo, Public Relations
Marizol Mamani, Social Worker
Alfonso Flores, Logistics Coordinator
José Choque, Equipment and Supplies
Coordinator
Sister Pabla Gonzales, Chaplain

Solidarity Bridge Team:

Ellen Eye, MD Gynecology
Mark Ottolin, MD Cardiology
Jana Mohan, MD Family Medicine
Cathy Flanagan, Communications and
Chaplain
Geetha Chandrasekar, Surgical Nurse
Ann Rhomberg, Trip Leader



These bi-cultural workweeks wouldn't be possible without high-quality language interpretation. We are very grateful for the time offered by five Bolivian interpreters—young doctors and medical students—who helped us bridge the language barrier. They are essential members of our team. We hope that their experience of mission also contributes to the goal of Puente de Solidaridad to form a healthcare workforce committed to prioritizing those who are most vulnerable.



Interpreters pictured left to right: Mariana Salazar, Francisco Decker, Nicole Fuentes, Pamela Copaga, and Dr. Luciana Rasguido