

REPORT
GENERAL SURGERY MISSION TRIP

February 14 – 23, 2014
Cochabamba and Tiquipaya, Bolivia

I. SUMMARY

The 2014 General Surgery Mission Trip (GSMT) took a team of 20 U.S. missionaries, including three surgeons, four anesthesiologists, a gastroenterologist, a physician's assistant, two nurses, a surgical technologist, and additional highly-skilled support staff, to work alongside local medical staff at two hospitals.

A total of 41 surgeries were performed:

- 21 surgeries at the *Instituto Gastroenterológico Boliviano Japonés* in Cochabamba (known as El Gastro Hospital).
- 20 surgeries at the *Hospital Municipal* in Tiquipaya, located just outside of Cochabamba.

In addition, 21 high-level gastroenterological procedures were performed.

The following report outlines how these activities form part of and contribute to broader Solidarity Bridge programs and goals.

Missioners, Dr. Malcolm Bilimoria and P.A. Allison Soward, and Bolivian partners, Dr. Vania Lozada and Dr. Iván Medrano, teamed up for particularly complex surgeries at El Gastro Hospital in Cochabamba.



II. MISSION GOALS

The annual GSMT is a fundamental component of the Solidarity Bridge General Surgery Program, which offers surgeries on an ongoing basis performed by Bolivian surgical partners. The Mission Trip has three primary goals:

- A. To provide high-complexity surgeries to patients who do not have access to such medical treatment, both because they cannot afford it and, in particular, because the level or type of surgery they need is not yet readily available.
- B. To monitor the performance and continue to upgrade the skills of established Bolivian surgical, anesthesia, and other medical partners, and to evaluate and train new local partners.
- C. To monitor, evaluate and fill equipment and supply needs to maintain and advance the program.

III. MEETING OUR GOALS

- A. To provide high-complexity surgeries to patients who do not have access to such medical treatment, both because they cannot afford it and, in particular, because the level or type of surgery they need is not yet readily available.*

Many of the most complex types of surgery are unavailable in Bolivia, due to a combination of contributing factors. It is difficult for even the best surgeons to access training in a procedure if it is not being done in the country. Surgeons may study abroad, but upon their return there will be little opportunity to continue to upgrade those skills, given that patients cannot afford the surgery, and the surgeon may lack access to the equipment and materials needed for optimal results. Their limited experience and resources may result in suboptimal patient outcomes, making it even less likely they will expand the offering and improve their skills through practice.

The GSMT directly addresses these barriers, in particular at El Gastro Hospital, the most important public hospital in the region and the referral hospital for the most complicated cases. The GSMT does this by bringing high-level training, donating the needed equipment and materials, and helping to identify patients and make it possible for them to receive their surgery.

A few examples from the current mission trip are:

- Dr. Malcolm Bilimoria worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Dr. Vania Lozada and others at El Gastro Hospital to perform three pancreatoduodenectomies, more commonly known as Whipples. The Whipple is the most complex abdominal surgery, and outcomes are proportionally improved according to the experience of the surgeon and hospital. Dr. Bilimoria, one of our country's most recognized surgeons in this procedure, is able to offer that experience and skill to impoverished Bolivian patients. Over several years

working with Dr. Lozada and others at El Gastro, Dr. Bilimoria has seen their skills vastly expand. In addition, the reputation of El Gastro has been enhanced, attracting more patients whose condition otherwise would have been deemed terminal.

Dr. Bilimoria and partner surgeons at El Gastro also performed a total gastrectomy, a liver resection, and an esophageal reconstruction, among other surgeries.

- Dr. John Gregory was called upon to correct grave injuries caused by mismanaged gall bladder surgeries performed elsewhere and subsequently referred to El Gastro. Specific training is very important for the management of such delicate cases. Our ultimate goal is to prevent such injuries, and therefore our year-round General Surgery Program places strong emphasis on training and equipping surgeons to safely perform the most common general surgeries, including gall bladders and hernias.

B. To monitor the performance and continue to upgrade the skills of established Bolivian surgical, anesthesia, and other medical partners, and to evaluate and train new local partners.

The year-round General Surgery Program relies on Bolivian partner surgeons to treat impoverished patients identified and screened by our Bolivian office on an ongoing basis. The annual GSMT serves to continually monitor and expand the skills of those partners and to be on the watch for qualified new partners. Some examples from GSMT 2014 are:

- Dr. Gay Garrett worked for the second year with our newest General Surgery Program partner, Dr. Luis Herrera, at the Tiquipaya Hospital, expanding his mastery of laparoscopic gall bladder and hernia surgery.
- In response to a specific training request, Dr. John Gregory partnered with Dr. Luis Herrera on a complex hiatal hernia case.
- Several additional staff surgeons as well as interns at both host hospitals observed and participated in all of the surgeries performed, as appropriate. For example, additional surgical partners at El Gastro Hospital included Drs. Medrano, Novillo, Otero, and Pereira. English-Spanish interpretation is provided in each O.R. not only for the communication between operating surgeons but also to provide continuous explanations and teaching in particular for the surgical interns. Over the years, there have been cases where such interns have sought us out in later years and ultimately become key partners.

C. To monitor, evaluate and fill equipment and supply needs to maintain and advance the program.

Our team delivered an estimated \$791,346 worth of instruments, supplies and medications, for use during the mission trip and by Bolivian partners within the year-round surgical programs. Many of the donated items are identified and procured by mission team surgeons and anesthesiologists themselves, according to the most strategic needs identified on previous mission trips. One important example of this is presented below:

□ This was the second GSMT to include gastroenterologist Dr. Mike Fischer. After GSMT 2013, El Gastro Hospital submitted an outline of the most critical equipment needs at the hospital, which Dr. Fischer combined with his own assessment of El Gastro’s capacities and gaps. Dr. Fischer then negotiated the support of the Billings Clinic in Montana to assemble a donation valued at over \$52,000, including up-to-date endoscopic instruments. This donation will greatly improve the quality of G.I. services provided to approximately 6,000 patients each year by El Gastro Hospital.



Solidarity Bridge Medical Director, Dr. Enrique Via-Reque, and gastroenterologist, Dr. Mike Fischer, during the formal delivery of strategic gastroenterological donations to El Gastro Hospital from the Billings Clinic. With them are Bolivian gastroenterologists Dr. Daniel Guerra, head of the G.I. department, and Dr. Ciro Zabala, Director of El Gastro Hospital.

IV. PATIENT STORY

We are pleased to share this story of one of the most critically-ill patients we served during this trip.

Gregoria, a 59-year-old mother of five, lives in the rural town of Punata, an hour east of Cochabamba. When Gregoria became ill and did not get better, she and her husband made the trip to Cochabamba where they learned she had pancreatic cancer. Gregoria speaks only Quechua, so she relied on her husband to communicate with the doctors as they explained the seriousness of the operation they planned to perform. Gregoria’s husband was very nervous about his wife’s surgery, but Dr. Bilimoria reassured him: “We will treat your wife as if she were our own family.” During the five-hour operation, Dr. Bilimoria and Bolivian partner Dr. Vania Lozada were relieved to find that the cancer



had not spread. They were able to successfully perform a Whipple procedure, which involves removal of the tumor and subsequent diversion and reconstruction of a large portion of the digestive system. Gregoria and her family were immensely relieved and grateful to learn that the outcome was the best the doctors had hoped for, and she is expected to fully recover. Gregoria spent ten days in El Gastro Hospital and is now back home with her family.

Gregoria's husband shakes

Dr. Malcolm Bilimoria's hand in gratitude, while Señora

Gregoria looks on. This photo was taken during morning rounds a few days after Gregoria's surgery.

V. MEMBERS OF THE 2014 GENERAL SURGERY MISSION TRIP TEAM

Coordination:

Jodi Grahl, Trip Coordinator

Sarah Hinojosa, Chaplain and Assistant Coordinator

Missioner Team:

Dr. Enrique Via-Reque, Trip Medical Director and Anesthesiologist

Dr. Daniel Yousif, Tiquipaya Medical Director and Anesthesiologist

Jennie Bagaconza, Registered Nurse

Dr. Malcolm Bilimoria, General Surgeon

Jacqueline Claros, Surgical Technologist

Dr. Patrick Duey, Anesthesiologist

Stephanie Evans, Registered Nurse

Dr. Mike Fischer, Gastroenterologist

Kristi Fischer, Physical Therapist

Dr. Jennifer Garcia Wojtzak, Anesthesiologist

Dr. Gay Garrett, General Surgeon

Dr. John Gregory, General Surgeon

Vivian Joffre, Interpreter/CT Tech

Grace Morse, Helper

Natalie Rodriguez, Interpreter/Photographer

Allison Soward, Physician's Assistant

Robin Wood, Interpreter

Local support: We could not complete our mission without the support of our local office, Puente de Solidaridad (PuenteSol), and our fantastic local volunteers!

PuenteSol:

Carlos Laserna, Executive Director

José Choque, Medical Supplies Coordinator

María Inés Uriona, Director of Medical Programs, Social Worker

Marisol Mamani, Assistant Social Worker

Yuvitsa Flores, Accountant
Verónica Castellón, Receptionist

Key Bolivian volunteers:

Dr. Vivian Camacho, Interpreter
Maria Eugenia Rojas, PuenteSol
Board member, Chaplain
Dr. Daniela Via Reque, Interpreter
Miguel Via Reque, Interpreter

*Missioners pose with mending patients
at the GSMT closing ceremony.*

