



SOLIDARITYBRIDGE
Healing & Empowering in Latin America

REPORT
GENERAL SURGERY MISSION TRIP
March 10-19, 2017
Cochabamba, Bolivia

I. INTRODUCTION

Ten U.S. missionaries traveled to Cochabamba, Bolivia, for the 2017 General Surgery Mission Trip (GSMT). The medical team included two general surgeons, two anesthesiologists and one physician assistant, supported by two interpreters, a chaplain and a trip leader. The trip was hosted by the Viedma General Hospital. One surgical team also worked two days at the Cochabamba Hospital, a new public facility located in the city center.

Viedma Hospital is the most important third-level reference hospital serving central Bolivia, and is often the last stop for the region's most critical patients in search of surgeries unavailable elsewhere. It is also the city's most important teaching hospital, having trained doctors in multiple disciplines for more than a century. Roughly 250 patient consultations per day and 60 surgeries per month are performed at Viedma. Even that is insufficient to keep pace with demand. The Cochabamba Hospital was opened to help meet that demand, and this mission trip visit also aimed to help reinforce the surgical capabilities of this new hospital.



Solidarity Bridge missionaries, Puente de Solidaridad staff, and Viedma Hospital leaders and surgeons posed on the last day following a group evaluation of the mission's achievements and lessons learned for the future.

II. MISSION HIGHLIGHTS

- **46 surgeries** were performed: 39 at Viedma Hospital and seven at Cochabamba Hospital.
- **Mentoring and training** were provided throughout the process of patient selection, discussion of treatment options, surgery and follow-up care.
- **In-kind donations** worth an estimated **\$513,457** were delivered by the mission team.

III. MISSION GOALS

The GSMT is a fundamental component of the Solidarity Bridge General Surgery Program that, in addition to operations performed by missionaries, offers surgeries by Bolivian partners on an ongoing basis. This Mission Trip had three primary goals:

- A. To provide high-complexity surgeries to patients without other access to treatment.
- B. To progressively support and upgrade the skills and capacities of established Bolivian surgical, anesthesia, and other medical partners, and to help train and form new professionals.
- C. To assess and fill equipment and supply needs to maintain and advance the program.

It is an honor for Solidarity Bridge and its missionaries to participate in the formation of the next generation of Bolivian doctors. Mission anesthesiologist Dr. Katie Podgorny was impressed by both “the technical and the instinctive skills” of Dr. Silver, the anesthesiology resident she was paired with at Viedma: *“He embodies all of the personality traits necessary to be a great anesthesiologist, specifically maintaining calm under pressure, sincere empathy, vigilance, and the ability to anticipate potential problems.”*



IV. MEETING OUR GOALS

- A. *To provide high-complexity surgeries to patients without access to treatment*

Multiple obstacles prevent many Bolivian patients from receiving surgery. Some complex procedures may not be offered in the country where it is difficult for surgeons to access updated training. Hospitals lack infrastructure, equipment or materials needed for some surgeries. Even when surgery is available, patients often cannot afford to pay fees and costs, even in Bolivia’s public hospitals. The GSMT addresses such barriers by bringing high-level training and strategically selected equipment and materials.

The 46 general surgeries provided on this trip include, among others:

- Seven gall bladder surgeries for patients with particularly complex conditions;
- 22 hernia repairs including abdominal, inguinal, umbilical and post-incisional hernias;
- 14 colon surgeries including a Miles surgery, six colostomy reversals, various partial or total colectomies, and others;
- Four surgical biopsies in relation to ovarian, pancreatic, rectal and colon cancers.

B. To support established Bolivian medical partners and the formation of new professionals

At Viedma Hospital, missioners operated alongside staff that included Dr. José Antonio Ramírez, Dr. Johnny Camacho, Dr. Gonzalo del Carpio, Dr. Jaime Vallejos and Dr. Tapia, while additional residents and medical students observed. Mission anesthesiologists also teamed up with local peers and residents. Opportunities were available for doctors and students to ask questions and participate in all steps of the process.

At Cochabamba Hospital, partner surgeon Dr. Luis Herrera organized a three-day course on “Laparoscopic Hernia and Colon Surgery” around the visit of Dr. Gay Garrett. The course was co-sponsored by the *Sociedad Boliviana de Cirugía* and the *Colegio Médico Departamental* of Cochabamba. In addition to collaborating in seven particularly complex surgeries at this hospital, Dr. Garrett presented a talk on laparoscopic colon surgery for Bolivian surgeons and other specialists, residents, and students who participated in the course.

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

Our team delivered equipment and supplies valued at \$513,457 for use on mission and by our Bolivian partners through the year-round surgical programs. Donations included 22 Medtronic pacemakers with leads and introducers, a variety of specialized surgical mesh for hernia repairs, anesthetics and medications donated by AmeriCares, as well as an array of high-value instruments. Many items were gathered by the missioners themselves according to the surgeries foreseen for the trip, and in response to partner needs identified on previous trips.

V. PATIENT STORY

Almost half the surgeries performed on this mission trip, and roughly one-third of surgeries performed through our year-round General Surgery Program, are hernia repairs. Prior to receiving training and specialized supplies from Solidarity Bridge, open hernia surgery was the norm in most of our partner hospitals. Laparoscopic hernia repair offers substantial benefits, and we now have several partners adept at the procedure. However, it takes significant practice to fully master laparoscopic hernia techniques, especially for the diversity of hernia types. Bolivian surgeons often choose to operate complex cases with our missioners as a way to provide better care to patients and to advance local training.

Carmen, age 42, suffered for years from a post-incisional, infra-umbilical hernia. Increasing pain forced Carmen to stop working. Her husband has a small locksmith shop in the front yard of the family’s rented home, and their 17-year-old son took a job to help support the five-member family, including two younger sisters. But without health insurance, the family could not afford Carmen’s surgery.

Carmen consulted with Solidarity Bridge’s longstanding surgical partner, Dr. Jaime Vallejos, at the Viedma Hospital. Given the complexity of her case, Dr. Vallejos selected Carmen to undergo surgery in conjunction with the mission trip. On March 14, Dr. Gay Garrett partnered with Viedma Hospital’s Chief of Surgery, Dr. José Antonio Ramírez, for Carmen’s delicate surgery.

Carmen’s family picked her up the next day to take her home to finish her recovery. The family is relieved to finally have their mother healthy again. Carmen looks forward to resuming her work baking and selling pastries, and to caring for her children.



VI. MISSION TEAM MEMBERS

Solidarity Bridge is grateful for each of the following individuals and the many unnamed others – the host hospital staffs, multiple donors and other supporters, and families and colleagues who covered for us back home – who together made this mission possible.

Coordination:

Jodi Grahl, Trip Leader
Ann Rhomberg, Chaplain

Missioners:

Dr. Malcolm Bilimoria, General Surgeon
Dr. Gay Garrett, General Surgeon
Dr. Jennifer Garcia Wojtczak, Anesthesiologist
Dr. Kathryn Podgorny, Anesthesiologist
Stephanie Lindemann, Physician Assistant
Vivian Joffre, Interpreter
Natalie Rodriguez, Interpreter
David Bougie, Medical Supplies Coordinator

Local leadership, staff and support:

The dedicated staff and board of *Puente de Solidaridad* manage local planning and logistics for our missions. They are key to the success of everything we do, and we are most grateful for all their work!

Puente de Solidaridad, Cochabamba:

Patricia Vargas, Executive Director
María Inés Uriona, Medical Programs Coordinator
José Choque, Medical Supplies Coordinator
Marcela Canedo, Public Relations
Vianca Vargas, Social Worker
Alfonso Flores, Logistical Support
Pablo Galindo, Logistical Support
Verónica Castellón, Administrative Assistant
Maria Eugenia Rojas, Chaplain
Fr. Dae Kim, Chaplain

Local volunteer interpreters:

Octavio Lazaro, fifth year medical student
Francisco Lazaro, fourth year medical student

*We extend a special **Thank You!** to the leadership and staff of Viedma General Hospital, especially Hospital Director **Dr. Daysi Rocabado** and Chief of Surgery **Dr. José Antonio Ramírez**.*



It was standing room only in the Viedma O.R. for residents and students to observe Dr. Jaime Vallejos and Dr. Gay Garrett perform laparoscopic surgery on GSMT 2017!