



**SOLIDARITYBRIDGE**  
*Healing & Empowering in Latin America*

**REPORT**  
**2016 GENERAL SURGERY MISSION TRIP II**  
October 1- 8, 2016  
Santa Cruz, Bolivia



Dr. Boris Urna and Dr. Magued Khouzam review the latest patient images before surgery. They are joined by Dr. Enrique Via Reque, Dr. Francisco Nuñez, Dr. José Foronda, and Judy Biggus, RN.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Solidarity Bridge General Surgery Program offers surgeries year-round, primarily performed by Bolivian partner surgeons. The program is based in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where annual General Surgery Mission Trips have helped equip and train Bolivian partners since 2007. In March 2015, at the invitation of the public San Juan de Dios Hospital in Santa Cruz, Solidarity Bridge sponsored its first General Surgery Mission Trip to this hospital which serves the most complex surgical needs of patients from throughout eastern Bolivia. The trip made important strides to advance training in higher-complexity laparoscopic procedures. In October 2016, a surgical team returned to the San Juan de Dios Hospital to build upon the progress achieved on the first visit.

## II. MISSION GOALS

The Mission Trip had four primary goals:

- A. To continue to upgrade laparoscopy skills of Bolivian staff surgeons at the San Juan de Dios Hospital in Santa Cruz, specifically in procedures not yet offered at this hospital.
- B. To assess existing equipment and skills and support training in complementary endoscopy procedures.
- C. To provide surgeries to patients who lack access to such medical treatment.
- D. To support the San Juan de Dios Hospital's medical education and training activities directed to medical students, residents, and the broader medical community in Santa Cruz.



General surgeon Dr. Boris Urna (center), coordinator of the mission on the part of the host hospital, oversees resident Dr. Jacqueline Ibañez as she assists Dr. Khouzam. Dr. Ibañez was assigned to compile and present the pre-selected patient cases to the mission team, and enjoyed the opportunity to observe and assist several surgeries.

## III. MEETING OUR GOALS

- A. *To upgrade the laparoscopy skills of practicing Bolivian surgeons.*

The San Juan de Dios Hospital has invested important efforts in recent years to expand its offerings in laparoscopic procedures, and this mission visit provided important hands-on training toward that goal. All mission surgeries were completed laparoscopically. It is important to note that while a few surgeries are routinely performed laparoscopically at this hospital, in particular gall bladder extractions, other laparoscopic approaches are less familiar. The mission provided the much-needed opportunity to advance these skills for hernia repairs, diverse colon procedures, and treatment of esophageal achalasia.

- B. *To assess equipment and skills and support training in complementary endoscopy procedures.*

The mission team included an experienced gastroenterologist, Dr. Francisco “Pancho” Nuñez, who contributed his expertise throughout the patient assessment, treatment, and follow-up processes. The San Juan de Dios Hospital does not have sufficient gastroenterology staff to have a specialist

available during most surgeries, so at the request of the Bolivian surgeons, Dr. Nuñez worked to impart basic training to complement their patient management.

*C. To provide high-complexity surgeries to patients who do not have access to such treatment.*

A total of seventeen patients ranging from age 18 to 77 underwent surgery. Operations performed included: six gallbladder removals, six hernia repairs of various types, two highly-complex procedures to treat esophageal achalasia, and three colon surgeries.

*D. To support the San Juan de Dios Hospital's medical education and training activities directed to medical students, residents, and the broader medical community in Santa Cruz.*

This mission trip provided the impetus for the organization of a broad and integral week of education and training, promoted as the “Second Course on General Surgery and Minimally Invasive Surgery.” Diverse activities were co-sponsored by the hospital and the Santa Cruz medical association, known as the *Colégio Médico*, which also hosted activities at its headquarters. The full course included:

- Live broadcast of mission surgeries, with simultaneous interpretation, through closed-circuit television in the hospital auditorium. The surgeries were followed and discussed in real time by other San Juan de Dios surgeons and specialists, residents, and medical students from throughout Santa Cruz. Post-surgical rounds were also heavily attended by the host hospital's surgical staff, residents and students, providing additional opportunities for education and training on the follow-up of those patients.
- Grand round lectures were offered in the evenings by diverse Bolivian surgeons and other specialists.
- Simulation laboratory training.



Dr. Khouzam demonstrates use of pelvic trainers in the “sim lab” located at the Santa Cruz *Colegio Médico*.

#### IV. PATIENT STORY

##### **Elvira, age 31**

Elvira's story illustrates how the inaccessibility of surgical care can impact an entire extended family, undermining even its best efforts to get ahead.



Elvira lost her father at a young age to a mysterious illness of the colon, and it appeared Elvira might suffer a similar fate. She underwent surgery for the first time in 2001 to manage her dolichocolon (an unusually long large intestine, which in Elvira's case led to severe digestive distress). That surgery failed to permanently resolve her ailments. Elvira holds a degree in environmental engineering, but was unable to work. Her husband, an unemployed doctor, was dedicated full-time to finding a solution for his wife's suffering, but his efforts were hampered by the young family's dwindling resources and the fact that the treatment Elvira needed was only available in elite private clinics. The couple and their three children, ages 6 months to 3 years, live with Elvira's sister, who took over much of the family's childcare as Elvira's condition worsened.

Doctors recommended that Elvira's entire colon be removed, rerouting her small intestine to replace it. It is a rare and complicated surgery, with a high risk of complication both during and after the procedure. Missioner Dr. Khouzam and local partners Dr. Urna and Dr. Foronda teamed up for the surgery performed on October 5<sup>th</sup>. Elvira spent another week in the hospital recovering. As anticipated, complications did emerge in the following weeks, but were successfully managed by Drs. Urna and Foronda in Santa Cruz in close consultation with Dr. Khouzam, who assisted in monitoring Elvira's evolution from the U.S.

After a difficult and long recovery, Elvira appears on the path to renewed health. Both she and her husband hope to soon leave this long struggle behind and return to their professional careers and forge a brighter future for their children.

## V. 2016 SANTA CRUZ GENERAL SURGERY MISSION TRIP TEAM

Solidarity Bridge is grateful for each of the missionaries and the many others – Puente de Solidaridad, our Bolivian medical partners and hospital staff, donors and supporters, and families and colleagues back home – who made this trip possible.

### **Missioners:**

Jodi Grahl, Trip Coordinator  
Dr. Enrique Via Reque, Medical Director  
Dr. Magued Khouzam, General Surgeon  
Dr. Francisco Nuñez, Gastroenterologist  
Judy Biggus R.N., Surgical Nurse  
Gustavo Arreguín, Interpreter & Photographer

### **Local office staff:**

Local planning and coordination were managed by **Puente de Solidaridad**. Staff from PdS headquarters in Cochabamba and the local Santa Cruz office also accompanied the mission.

Patricia Vargas, Executive Director  
Patricia Paz, Coordinator of the Santa Cruz office  
José Choque, Medical Supplies Coordinator  
Carmen Salses, Santa Cruz Social Worker  
Desirée Méndez, Santa Cruz Supplies Coordinator  
Ariel Montaña, Communications

Solidarity Bridge and Puente de Solidaridad highlight the key leadership and support roles performed by our many **partners at San Juan de Dios Hospital**, including the following named individuals as well as multiple members of the hospital's administration and surgical, nursing, anesthesia, sterilization, and other staff.

Dr. Boris Urna, General Surgeon, Coordinator  
Dr. José Luis Foronda, General Surgeon  
Dr. Diego Artunduaga, General Surgeon, Medical Interpreter  
Dr. Jacqueline Ibañez, 1st year surgical resident, responsible for patient preparation