

SOLIDARITY BRIDGE

Neurosurgery Mission Trip

Asunción, Paraguay

July 27-August 3, 2019



I. Introduction

In July 2019, Solidarity Bridge completed a Neurosurgical Mission Trip to Asunción Paraguay. Five neurosurgeons and three Solidarity Bridge staff participated in this trip that involved meetings with key leaders in Paraguay, conducting a baseline assessment at the Hospital Nacional de Itauguá, and participating in the National Congress of the Paraguayan Neurosurgical Society.

II. Trip Goals

- Explore opportunities for long-term partnership to advance neurosurgical and peri-operative care at the Hospital Itauguá in Paraguay.
- Participate in the second National Congress of the Paraguayan Neurosurgical Society.

III. Activities and Achievements

Meetings with Key Leaders

This Neurosurgery Mission Trip was unique in that the majority of the week was spent in meetings with key leaders and hospital personnel to explore opportunities for long-term engagement in Paraguay and develop networks of support that would make such efforts viable and impactful.

The team was comprised of new and veteran missionaries and Solidarity Bridge staff, including Juan Lorenzo Hinojosa, Ann Rhomberg, Lindsay Doucette, Dr. Richard Moser, Dr. Art DiPatri, Dr. Carolina Sandoval-Garcia, Dr. Roxanna Garcia, and Dr. Mark Piedra.

The week began with several important meetings on Monday. The first was with the Archbishop of Paraguay, Edmundo Valenzuela. The team presented Archbishop Valenzuela with a special cross from the Archdiocese of Chicago as a recognition of our relationship of mutual support. As Father Oscar Gonzalez said, the Church witnesses firsthand the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Solidarity Bridge commits to working to increase surgical access by supporting the public health institutions that serve those without access to resources. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church provides infrastructure, support, and legitimacy for Solidarity Bridge's work in Paraguay.



The second meeting was with the National Minister of Public Health, Dr. Julio Mazzoleni. Support from the Ministry of Public Health is key in Paraguay where all public hospitals report directly to and are dependent on the national health ministry office. Our meeting provided a valuable opportunity to inform the Minister about our work and discuss a collaboration agreement with the Public Health Ministry. We were joined by Dr. Yolanda González, Director of the National Hospital of Itauguá, and Dr. José Kuzli, Director of the Itauguá Neurosurgery Service. The Solidarity Bridge team was inspired to see these doctors advocate for the needs of the Itauguá Hospital, the largest public hospital in Paraguay.

Hospital Nacional de Itauguá



The following day, the mission team traveled to Itauguá to spend time at the National Hospital. This public referral hospital sees an enormous volume of surgical cases each year. In neurosurgery alone, there were over 1,000 surgeries last year, the majority of which were unplanned. The doctors we met spoke of an epidemic of motorcycle accidents in Paraguay. For this reason, they emphasized the need for greater equipping and training to respond to neurotrauma. While Itauguá is the country's largest public hospital, it lacks basic equipment, particularly in the area of neurosurgery. The Solidarity Bridge neurosurgery team presented the proposal for a long-term partnership at the Itauguá Hospital to advance neurosurgical care. The heads of

the hospital's surgical and perioperative services were invited to share their thoughts on the proposal and all seemed to welcome any efforts that would bring new resources, equipment, and training to the hospital. At the same time, these hospital leaders spoke highly of the hospital's human capital and the commitment of hospital personnel.

The team spent the following day in interviews with the directors of the departments of Nursing, Adult and Pediatric Intensive Care, Emergency, Anesthesia, Internal Medicine, Neurology, Radiology, and Neurosurgery. The various departments were generous with their time and expressed their gratitude for any future efforts to support their work and the Itauguá hospital. These interviews will help to jointly identify priorities and areas where Solidarity Bridge could contribute in a meaningful way in the coming years.

Paraguayan Neurosurgical Congress

On Wednesday evening, the team was invited to a dinner with the Paraguayan Neurosurgical Society as a means of welcoming us to the start of their second National Congress. This Congress began in 2017 through the leadership of Dr. Carlos Feltes. Dr. Feltes recognized the need to connect the Paraguayan neurosurgical community to the rest of the world. He felt they had been isolated and needed to welcome new ideas and connections to advancements in the field.

In this spirit of broader connection to the wider world of neurosurgery, the Paraguayan neurosurgical community had asked Solidarity Bridge to convene U.S. experts in epilepsy surgery and functional neurosurgery to participate as international faculty in the 2019 Congress. In response to this request, Solidarity Bridge extended the invitation to Dr. Carolina Sandoval-Garcia from the University Of Minnesota Medical School, Dr. Art DiPatri from Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, and Dr. Mark Piedra from the Billings Clinic. Together they delivered a series of lectures on epilepsy surgery and functional neurosurgery as part of the Congress program. Lecture topics included:

- Thinking about the Temporal Lobe: Surgical Strategies
- Pragmatic Model for Patient Selection in Resource Poor Health System
- Global Burden of Epilepsy and Consequences of Care
- Surgery for Drug Resistant Epilepsy in Children
- Multi-lobar Surgery: Current Surgical Strategies in Children with Hemispheric Malformations
- Role of VNS, TNS and DBS: Other Interventions
- Treatment Options with Limited Resources



The Solidarity Bridge team felt very welcome at the Congress. It was a great opportunity to reconnect with colleagues in the Paraguayan neurosurgical community and strengthen the collaboration initiated in the spring of 2018 through the first neurosurgical mission trip to Paraguay.

Visiting the Trauma Hospital

During the Congress, members of the team took a tour of the Trauma Hospital, Asunción's main public emergency hospital. The hospital's Director of Neurosurgery, Dr. Carlos Villamayor, led the tour and spoke of an "epidemic" of motorcycle accidents, which account for nearly 75% of the patients who arrive at the hospital. Of those, 20% suffer from some form of neuro trauma. Solidarity Bridge neurosurgery medical director, Dr. Richard Moser, spoke with the hospital's neurosurgery team about possible future courses on perioperative response to neuro trauma.

Next Steps

The Solidarity Bridge neurosurgery team looks forward to continued partnership in Paraguay. The next steps will be to complete and share the results from the Itauguá baseline assessment. From there, Solidarity Bridge will work with the hospital to identify training and equipping priorities and develop a roadmap for the future of the partnership. Solidarity Bridge will also work to finalize agreements with the Ministry of Health and maintain ongoing dialogue with our partners at Caritas and the Hospital Nacional de Itauguá.

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Dr. Roque Acosta, Episcopal Conference of Paraguay
Fr. Óscar González, Episcopal Vicar

Hospital Nacional de Itauguá

Dr. Yolanda González
Dr. José Kuzli
Dr. Pablo Maidana
Dr. Ramón Migliorisi

Dr. Diego Servian
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Paraguayan Neurosurgical Society

Dr. Reddy Simón
Dr. Carlos Feltes

Solidarity Bridge Missioners

Dr. Richard Moser
Dr. Arthur DiPatri
Dr. Carolina Sandoval-Garcia
Dr. Mark Piedra
Dr. Roxanna Garcia

Solidarity Bridge Team Leaders

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