



April 29, 2004

Supporters of Medical Aid for Children of Latin America,

As a volunteer returning from a medical mission, I am always reflective and introspective. One could say that in my own self-interest, I think back to the patients who have impacted and touched our group and myself the most intimately. It quickly soothes my exhaustion from the hard work, the difficulties and the pain involved in making this medical trip possible. This year was no different.

On the last day of clinic, our groups were packing equipment, seeing patients, changing dressings, and readying to return to our relatively spoiled American homes. A young Dominican mother brought in her two year old boy, whose cleft lip had been repaired the previous week. She wanted to show the team and the surgeon how beautiful he looked and how proud she was of her son.

He had been discharged the day after the operation to be taken care of in a far off clinic, but because of her delight and thankfulness, she borrowed the money for the bus ride, brought us a home baked loaf of bread and a small trinket for the surgeon. She just had to give thanks to the surgeon and team who had operated on her son. She wept when she learned that he and the first team had already left. The delight she had for her child to look normal and the thoughtfulness she extended just to thank those responsible touched us deeply.

A 13-year-old girl's mother brought her in because she had never been able to see well. She had congenital opacified, or cloudy, corneas since birth, making her vision less than 5 percent. All she needed was a routine, by American standards, an expensive corneal transplant. MACLA paid for the surgery and arranged it through an eye clinic, which after 20 years of working in the Dominican Republic, we knew to be reputable. Two weeks ago she had her corneal transplant and already her vision is improved to greater than 90 percent. She now sees her mother, her family, her world...

The second week, we met a hilarious and somewhat crazed 46-year-old man who was dirty and poor. For 20 years he had an infectious deformity resulting in a graft and flap repair of his mouth leaving him with a mouth he could not even put a spoon in to eat well. Because of his appearance, he had also been the object of ridicule. However, he was gregarious and happy, and at times visibly drunk. After a bit of sobering him up, our team subsequently operated on him reconstructing a new mouth. Within a few days after his operation he could open his mouth, chew, smile and eat normally. He, however, remained somewhat of a goofy character that still brings us delight. (Photo #3)

The family of a 16-year-old boy gave little presents to the team and a letter his mother had written that warmed our hearts. It is translated on the back of the photo page. This young man had a congenital deformity with extra fingers and loss of function to most of his right hand. Six days after surgery, he returned to our clinic already moving and using his hand.

Jenny Acusto, a 7-year-old, returned with her mother four years after her rare, midline cleft lip had been repaired at the age of 3 years old. She, too, had been chastised and ridiculed and could not talk well. She looks great, her mother has enrolled her in school and her speech is normal. It took a day by bus, burro and walking for hours just to show us their gratitude. It is very rewarding when a patient's family returns to let us see the results of our work. (Photo #4)

We are again privileged and humbled to have so many caring volunteers desiring to help. This was our 20<sup>th</sup> year in the Dominican Republic. We saw over a 1000 new consultation patients and operated on 209 people. We left medicines, equipment and supplies for orphanages, outlying clinics and the host hospital allowing for the treatment of hundreds of others.

This last year, you have supplied three operating room beds which replaced ones that were so dilapidated that the patients were falling off of them. You helped others with continued burn grafts in respectable burn centers in the Dominican Republic as well as endless other medical problems.

You have helped ease the strife of those who do not have enough food, transportation, medical care or a comfortable place to sleep at night. Most of our patients are happy and content, though bleakly poor, and

appreciate the blessings you have given them. To be able to run after a ball, grasp a fork or walk down the street looking more normal is all they wish. They are satisfied with the fortune of some simple improvement.

Led by Dr. Dana Towle, MACLA will continue to make inroads into Bolivia, the second poorest country, next to Haiti, in the Western Hemisphere. Last fall there was too much political unrest for our medical-surgical group to work in LaPaz. Since it is calmer, our teams are expected to return this summer to attend to the medical-surgical needs in that country. We have found the people of Bolivia to be warm and caring.

Through our mutual efforts, gifts and work, we realize that the deeds of charity shall stay with us forever. Over the past 20 years, you have helped MACLA lift a burden from our fellow man and it is indeed a privilege to do so. I commend and encourage you in your future benevolence. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Geraghty, M.D.

TEG:ml