

Medical Mission Guatemala

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I am truly honored to be a recipient of the ASPAN Humanitarian Mission Scholarship. Having just returned from the trip, I am overwhelmed with emotion! It was a true honor and blessing to be able to go on this journey... feeling more like a receiver than the giver!

I was blessed to have joined a group of more than 30 people on this surgical mission team as we headed to Retalhuleu, Guatemala from August 19 to 27, 2016. Despite stormy weather that delayed our flights, we forged great bonds of teamwork and camaraderie that prepared us for our arrival. Our ability to navigate the unexpected with innovation and determination launched us on a trajectory for an amazing week. I would learn as much from my team of colleagues as I would from the patients I thought I went to serve.



Some of the most profound and memorable moments of the trip were those simple moments that demonstrated the capacity of human caring and emotion beyond language barriers. This trip was not just about providing surgical care to those in need, but about sharing love and talents that we've been given with others. I knew I was in for a memorable week as we arrived and were greeted by the gracious people awaiting our care; smiles proliferated in adults and children alike. Partnered with the excitement and trust of the local staff, we all became one as the teams and patients joined hands and hearts in prayer for the week ahead.



We greeted our new friends and promptly went to work setting up operating rooms, pre-op and recovery areas, and wards. Doctors and anesthetists screened patients who would be entrusted to our care in the following days. Excitement and energy permeated the hospital that burst to life with a hustle and bustle. The marvelous team of volunteers worked in harmony with the local individuals to care for patients who had laparoscopic cholecystectomies, hernia repairs, sinus surgeries, tonsil surgeries, and lump resections. Over 80 surgeries would be complete and lives would be changed in more ways than one.



Tears moistened several faces as patients awoke from surgery; not because of pain, but because of feelings of thanks, relief, joy, and renewed hope. My heart overflowed with gratitude and a renewed sense of purpose and simplicity. The capacity to care and the human touch of sharing a smile, enjoying a laugh, holding a hand, and sharing a hug are central to the human spirit. We all want to be loved and have lives that matter. The capacity to show love transcends beyond geography, language, age, and beliefs to touch all of humanity.



I return home on another mission... to live life purposefully; to be present and intentional in the interactions with people each and every day; to choose to cherish simplicity in the chaos of life that surrounds me, and be thankful each and every day. Until the next trip abroad, I am “on mission” in the here and now . . .

With renewed gratitude and humility,

Lauri J. Ledbeter, MSN, RN-BC, CNE, CAPA