

WakeECHO Brigade #10 October 2022

After a long hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, WakeECHO Brigade #10 to Honduras took place from October 23 to October 30; to provide cataract, cornea, and subspecialty surgery, as well as ophthalmology consultations to the indigent in Honduras. As with our previous brigades, we partnered with our sister eye clinic—the Lions Club Eye Hospital Fraternidad in San Pedro Sula. This trip was generously sponsored by Hanes Brands, (headquarters in Winston Salem, and manufacturing facilities in San Pedro Sula); Alcon graciously provided critical surgical supplies (for the tenth time!) and CorneaGen provided corneal tissue and equipment essential for cornea transplantation.



The team for this trip included ophthalmology faculty (Drs. Giegengack, Martin, Kauffman, Hayes), seasoned alumni surgeons (Drs. Evans and Foster), fellows (Drs. Higgins and Anderson), residents, (Drs. Selander and Fredell), medical student (Anania Woldetensaye MS4), nurse (Faye Martin RN); as well as Kyle Coffee DO (founding CEO of ECHO) and Hanes team members (Teddy Mendosa, Nicole Ducour, Alma Ariño).



The primary purpose of the brigades is to restore sight to those who may not have the means or opportunity for ophthalmic surgical or medical care. We also hope to equip and inspire students, residents, fellows and faculty for international service throughout their careers to address the enormous burden global blindness from cataract—which can be reversed with a brief surgery in skilled hands.



There are many extraordinary features of this brigade that have built on the hard work of the Lions Club Eye Hospital Fraternidad with CEO Oscar Santos and Chief Surgeon Franco Pacheco, WakeECHO and Wake Forest Department of Ophthalmology, and our new partner—the Hanes Brands Inc:

The Hospital now has a cornea specialist, Dr. Katerin Pineda, but with no access to cornea tissue for transplantation and limited opportunity for cornea transplantation procedures; Dr. Giegengack operated with Dr. Katerin, performing the corneal transplants throughout the week, with cornea tissue brought with us (on the plane in a cooler!).



Also new this year—the Eye Hospital now has posterior vitrectomy capability. Dr. Hayes and the Honduran retina specialist Angelo Murcia assisted each other with retinal surgery each day and performed lasers and retinal evaluations in the clinic.



This year we had full surgical tech support from Hospital Fraternidad, with local surgical technicians setting up and assisting with all surgeries. We typically had four surgical beds going throughout the day, and sometimes five going simultaneously!



We were fortunate to have such experienced surgeons (and nurse) on the team, especially given the complexity and volume of the patients during this week.



Our medical student (Anania Woldetensaye) has participated in all aspects of this endeavor and has excelled as our digital record keeper-- not an easy task given our multiple locations throughout the hospital.



Our residents and fellows were fully immersed into the world of a Manual Small Incision Cataract Surgery (MSICS) under the expertise of our faculty surgeons and did many phacoemulsification surgeries as well.



We even had a “Master Class” with Dr. Pacheco, ophthalmology chief at the hospital, who demonstrated ambidextrous MSICS surgery—sitting at the head of the bed, using the right hand for the right eye, and left hand for the left eye. We were all able to observe since several of the scopes are outfitted with a video camera for teaching.



We stayed busy in the clinic as well as the operating room, typically seeing 25+ pre-op patients, 25+ postop patients, and assorted subspecialty consultations each day. The postop clinic is arguably the best part of the job—seeing the dramatic difference cataract surgery can make!



Thursday evening we presented the Fifth Wake Forest Eye Center/Hospital Fraternidad Ophthalmology Conference in San Pedro Sula, which was attended by 30+ local Honduran eyecare professionals. Hosted by Dr. Martin, each of our residents and fellows delivered polished presentations including case reports and didactic teaching. Dr. Giegengack presented “game-changing” research on corneal cell transplantation and Dr. Hayes gave his entire retina lecture in Spanish! The evening was capped off with a historical perspective of WakeECHO partnership with the Hospital Fraternidad by Dr. Kyle Coffey.



We have greatly benefited from our association with Hanes Brands for this brigade, including the many volunteers throughout the week that served as translators for all aspects of our work. These were all local bilingual Hanes employees from San Pedro Sula, and we enjoyed getting to know these folks as they helped us throughout the week. Many of them had no medical experience, so it was “an eye opening” experience for them to see patients from pre op to post op. Those brave enough to help us in the operating room were absolutely astounded by the surgery--especially manual small incision cataract surgery--where one can see the brown/yellow lens removed intact. Hanes also had a videographer to document the brigade and interview doctors and patients.



The hospitality and kindness to our team members was unending—including the legendary meal with Grillmaster Dr. Pacheco—we were well-fed throughout the week; and enjoyed a day at the beach after seeing our final post-ops!



Totals for the week: 129 cataract surgeries, 13 cornea procedures; 10 retina surgeries, and 5 retina lasers; 150+ patients evaluated in the clinic; 7 lectures, two live cataract demonstrations, and countless friendships formed!

There were many happy postoperative patients, especially the bilaterally blind patients that were led in by family and walked out with regained sight!





We are grateful for support from many:

Hanes Brands Inc. sponsored this trip including the cost of transportation and housing for our team, as well as providing support personnel in San Pedro Sula before, during, and after the trip. Local bilingual Hanes employees served as interpreters (there were so many who wanted to serve they rotated every half day—so 100+ participated!). Long after this trip is over, they will continue their friendship and support of the eye hospital – – Perhaps one of the most significant lasting legacies of this trip!

Alcon has been our faithful partner in our 10 brigades, supplying intraocular lenses, phaco packs, disposable surgical instruments, surgical drapes, and many other required items – – retail value of the supplies donated is greater than \$200,000 for each trip.

CorneaGen supplied 10 donated cornea tissues as well as the equipment needed to transplant them. Central America has no eye bank, consequently the only way to treat corneal blindness in Honduras is with these generous donations.

WakeECHO, Our Ophthalmology Department international outreach, exists because of the hard work and generosity of its founding CEO, Dr. Kyle Coffey. We were very fortunate he was able to join us on this brigade.

We are appreciative of the support Wake Forest School of Medicine **Department of Ophthalmology**. and encouragement of the Chairman, Dr Craig Greven — who permits us to take our busy faculty clinicians, residents and fellows away from the eye center for a week, and provides the administrative infrastructure of WakeECHO; and our home team support from Julia Garber and Kathleen Lambert.

The Lions Club of San Pedro Sula must be the most remarkable Lions Club in the world—to have built and prospered the **Eye Hospital Fraternidad** to serve the indigent in Honduras. CEO Oscar Santos, ophthalmology chief Franco Pacheco and the staff at the hospital are our friends and partners, and have achieved an astounding expansion of infrastructure and services in a few short years.

We received generous support from **individual donors** such as Joel Schneider, a philanthropist who provided a funding for eyedrops for our postop patients and purchase of surgical instruments/trays that will continue to be used on many future trips. Dr. Joe Dickinson, a veteran of many of these brigades, contributed his surgical instrument sets for our ongoing mission in his retirement. Many other individual donors have given to support this brigade and the WakeECHO effort.

With gratitude from the WakeECHO brigade co-directors:

Matthew Giegengack MD
mgiegeng@wakehealth.edu

Timothy Martin MD
tmmartin@wakehealth.edu