

Wake Forest - Ending Cataracts in Honduras Outreach (ECHO) Program Brigade #16 Newsletter Summer 2025

Hello Wake Forest family! We wanted to send an update from our most recent mission trip to Honduras. This was the 16th official Wake ECHO brigade since the integration of the ECHO Program into the Wake Forest Baptist Department of Ophthalmology in 2015. While the program has grown and evolved over the past 10 years, our goals remain the same:

- Perform vision restoring surgery for the poor and underserved in Honduras
- Help our partnering providers and clinics grow in their own ability to meet the needs of their local community through training, supplies and strategic investments
- Introduce our trainees to international mission work and foster a passion for service that will continue throughout their careers

The Brigade 16 team included many return volunteers and a few first-time team members: Wake Forest faculty Matt Giegengack, Levi Kauffman, Mike Evans, Dean Bonsall and Jagger Koerner; residents Alex Villarreal and Frances de la Camara; cornea fellow Charles Pophal; medical student Rainer Rodriguez, and program alumnus Brent Betts.



The team split into two groups, with the cornea and pediatric teams staying in San Pedro Sula to provide subspecialty care at the Lions Eye Club Hospital Fraternidad. The other half of the team travelled to La Entrada to perform cataract surgeries at the Clinica Manos Amigos.

Cornea Team

Matt Giegengack and cornea fellow Charles Pophal (making his second trip) worked with Dra. Katerin Pineda to perform 15 cornea transplants over two days. Dra. Pineda is a very gifted cataract and cornea surgeon but unfortunately does not have access to corneal tissue as there is no eye bank in Honduras. The corneal tissue brought by the team was generously donated by CorneaGen and gives the hope of sight to many patients suffering from corneal blindness in Honduras.



Pediatrics Team

This is the 4th brigade that included pediatric ophthalmology and strabismus surgeries. Dr. Bonsall and Dr. Koerner completed a record fifty-two eye muscle procedures with Dr. Juarez. Dr. Juarez is the local pediatric ophthalmologist who hosts us in San Pedro Sula. We operated on adult strabismus for the second time as well during this brigade. Offering corrective eye alignment surgery to these adults is more than just a cosmetic procedure, it is life altering.



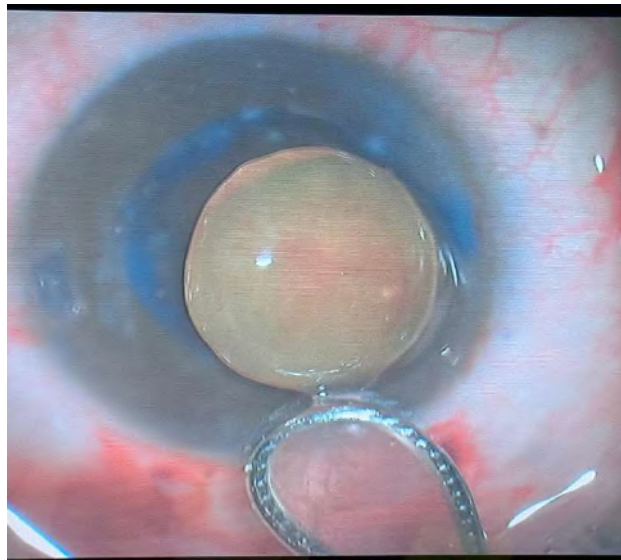
We are indebted to Dr. Guillermo Pineda for providing general anesthesia services for our patients that made this brigade a huge success! We look forward to continuing the much-needed pediatric ophthalmology and adult strabismus services in Honduras.

We would like to highlight one of our patients, Alana. She had bilateral sixth nerve palsies from Moebius Syndrome. Our team performed a complex transposition procedure on her eye muscles in both of her eyes forever changing her life!



Cataract Team

Meanwhile the cataract team in La Entrada was busy performing both phacoemulsification and manual small incision cataract surgeries. We were grateful to have Brent Betts join us from his private practice in Idaho. He came as a resident on one of the very first brigades in 2016 and has a passion for international service. The team enjoyed watching him perform a secondary IOL implantation via Yamane scleral fixation and a pupilloplasty on patient with an iris coloboma. Many thanks to Serving at the Crossroads who purchased the video camera adapter for the operating microscope so we could all watch each other and learn.



The Manos Amigos nurses continue to provide excellent surgical assistance by running the autoclaves, circulating and scrubbing for our surgeries. Local optometrist Karen Murillo works countless hours directing patients, helping with exams and performing blocks. We are also helped out by Dr. David Pacheco who assists with pre-op and post-op patient care.



Chief residents Alex Villarreal and Frances de la Camara performed many cataract surgeries each under the supervision of Wake Forest faculty and did a fantastic job. Graduating residents routinely rate this trip as the highlight of their residency experience and many return as alumni with us on brigades or participate in other global ophthalmology service trips throughout their careers. Fourth year medical student Rainer Rodriquez kept busy documenting our patient information, interpreting and even learned to perform retrobulbar blocks.



On Saturday afternoon the brigade teams regrouped in San Pedro Sula to hold a surprise 80th birthday party for our dear friend Oscar Santos, the CEO of the Lions Eye Club Hospital Fraternidad. He has a passion for fighting blindness and helping the poor in Honduras, and under his leadership, the Hospital Fraternidad has grown from a small facility doing a few hundred cataracts per year to a very busy hospital where over 6000 cataract surgeries are performed annually. This represents a majority of the cataract surgeries done in the country each year. The hospital provides high quality and low cost or free surgeries for the poor in San Pedro Sula and surrounding areas. The hospital has added pediatric, cornea and retina specialists and hosts ophthalmology residents and fellows doing clinical rotations from other programs in Central America. We're very proud of the work he has done and honored to have been able to play a small part in the growth and success of this amazing hospital.



We are very grateful for the continued support from our many sponsors:

Alcon has supported our mission from the very beginning and continues to generously supply us with intraocular lenses, disposable surgical instruments, surgical drapes, viscoelastic, and many other items. Without their support these trips would not be possible.

CorneaGen donated tissue for 15 cornea transplants, as well as the equipment needed to transplant them. We also thank the anonymous cornea tissue donors themselves, who gave a priceless gift to enable the sight of others.

ImprimisRx donated compounded drops so that patients could get their post operative medications free of charge.

Rayner Surgical donated samples of Omidria for use during cataract surgeries

We received generous support from **individual donors** who have given to support this brigade and the WakeECHO effort. Numerous **alumni** take part in the **Sight Share** and donate some of the proceeds from cataract surgery to the WakeECHO program.

The Wake Forest School of Medicine Department of Ophthalmology and its Chairman Dr. Craig Greven, who continues to support our mission and allows our faculty, residents and fellows to take a week away from clinical duties. Julia Garber works hard behind the scenes on trip planning and logistics.

The Lions Club of San Pedro Sula and the **Eye Hospital Fraternidad** and **CEO Oscar Santos** who shares our passion for fighting blindness in Honduras.

The **Manos Amigos Clinic**, including medical director **Dra. Delmy Sanchez** who helped with planning and logistics to make our trip successful; optometrist **Karen Murillo** who takes great care of the patients in La Entrada; **Carlos** who transported our team safely each day; **Dr. David Pacheco** who helped with the pre- and post-operative care of our patients; and the nurses who work hard to make our trips a success

We are also grateful to **Mike Tysowsky** and **Serving at the Crossroads** for their amazing work and vision for the Manos Amigos clinic.

With gratitude from the WakeECHO Brigade 16 leaders,

Matt Giegengack, Levi Kauffman and Mike Evans

If you are interested in coming on a surgical brigade, or would like to donate funds, equipment or supplies to help support our mission please reach out to:

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