

WakeECHO Brigade #13 - June 2024

Hello Wake Forest family! We wanted to send an update from the WakeECHO program, which recently sent Brigade # 13 on a mission trip to Honduras from June 9-16, 2024. This Brigade accomplished several “firsts” for the program, including:

- the first time operating at the Manos Amigos clinic in La Entrada, Honduras
- the first time performing pediatric strabismus surgery under general anesthesia
- the first time using our new Oertli portable phacoemulsification platform

The Brigade 13 team included Wake Forest faculty Matt Giegengack, Levi Kauffman and Mike Evans, as well as Dean Bonsall who made his first trip to Honduras; Residents Sam Carpentier, Dominic Prado and Frances de la Camara; Cornea fellow Sarah Griffin, and medical student Harrison Huang.



The first part of the trip took place at the Lions Club Hospital Fraternidad in San Pedro Sula, which has been our sister site in Honduras since the very first WakeECHO brigade. Under the leadership of CEO Oscar Santos, the hospital has grown from a small clinic performing only a few hundred cataract surgeries per year to an extremely busy clinical and surgical hospital that now performs more than 5,000 cataract surgeries per year in addition to numerous cornea, retina and other surgeries. The hospital now employs 9 ophthalmologists, numerous optometrists, and often has residents and fellows from all over Central America rotating through.



During our time at San Pedro Sula Mike, Levi, Sam and Dominic did MSICS and phacoemulsification surgeries while Matt and Sarah worked with local cornea specialist Dr. Katerin Pineda to perform 15 cornea transplants over 2 days. The cornea tissue was generously donated by CorneaGen. Because Honduras does not have a national eye bank to supply corneal tissue, these donated corneas represent a large majority of the transplants that will occur in Honduras each year.



Meanwhile, Dean and Frances worked with pediatric ophthalmologist Dr. Perla Juarez to perform strabismus surgery on 7 patients. While Dr. Koerner had performed strabismus surgeries on older patients on Brigade #11, this was the first time that we had general anesthesia capabilities which allowed our team to operate on children. One of the greatest rewards of this trip was seeing these patients at their post op visits with straightened eyes and resolved head tilts. This was Dean Bonsall's first trip to Honduras, and it is safe to say he is now hooked and looking forward to a return trip.



We were joined in our work by representatives from Hanes Corp, who generously donated funds to support our mission trip and supplied translators and other helpers throughout our time in San Pedro Sula.

Midway through the week our team travelled to the city of La Entrada, which is in the western part of the country and named for its location as the gateway to the mountainous western highlands of Honduras and the Copan Mayan ruins. The Manos Amigas clinic is a privately owned charity medical clinic in La Entrada that was started by an American non-profit organization called Serving at the Crossroads. This clinic provides free or low cost medical and dental care to the poor and underserved people in the area, and in recent years has expanded their facilities by building an eye clinic and three operating rooms. While they have an excellent optometrist in Karen Murillo, who provides basic eye care for the people of La Entrada, there are many people in need of cataract surgery who cannot afford to travel to larger cities for surgery. Organizations such as Vision Health International (VHI) have done an admirable job bringing cataract and oculoplastics surgical brigades to this site, but the operating rooms are unused for much of the year. There remains a large unmet need for cataract surgery.



In 2023 our organization was contacted by Mike Tysowsky who is the Chair of the Serving at the Crossroads Board, asking if we would be interested in doing cataract surgery brigades at Manos Amigas to help meet this large need. Having witnessed how the Hospital Fraternidad in San Pedro Sula has flourished and expanded their own cataract surgery capabilities over recent years, we discussed with Oscar Santos the possibility of expanding to another location in Honduras in greater need of assistance with cataract surgery. We visited the Manos Amigos Clinic in December of 2023 and we were very impressed with not only the facilities but the great charitable work that was happening at the clinic.

We planned to perform a small number of cataract surgeries on this inaugural trip to the Manos Amigos clinic as a trial run. On Wednesday we saw cataract evaluations and on Thursday and Friday performed about 20 cataract surgeries. The Manos Amigos clinic provided three excellent surgical nurses who ran the autoclaves, circulated and scrubbed for our surgeries. The optometrist Karen Murillo helped direct patients and perform blocks. We had a very smooth and successful first surgical trip and made many new friends at the clinic. We are looking forward to returning on our next brigade in January and hopefully increasing our surgical volume on subsequent trips.



This trip was also our first chance to use the new Oertli Catarhex 3 unit, which we were able to purchase thanks to a very generous donation from Dr. Brian Foster. In the past we performed phacoemulsification on the Alcon Infiniti Phaco machines, but these older machines have been recently retired by Alcon and the phaco packs, which were designed for single use only, are no longer produced. The Catarhex 3 is a rugged phacoemulsification unit designed with mission work in mind, and it is small and portable enough to fit in an airplane overhead compartment. The cartridges are also sterilizable which allows them to be re-used many times, significantly decreasing the cost per case. We were all very impressed with how well the machine performed, and we are excited for Dr. Foster to join us on future trips so he can see his donation in action.



One of the chief aims of the WakeECHO program is to introduce our trainees to international mission work and foster a passion for service that will continue into their careers. Chief residents Dominic Prado and Sam Carpentier were indispensable in helping with pre-op and post-op clinic and performed many cataract surgeries each under the supervision of Wake Forest faculty. Frances de la Camara, who is a rising PGY-4 applying to pediatric ophthalmology fellowship this fall, worked with Dr. Bonsall on strabismus surgeries and her Spanish skills were a great asset in La Entrada. Sarah Griffin, our cornea fellow, came for her second trip to Honduras this academic year and performed several of the cornea transplants. Our medical student Harrison Huang kept busy documenting our patient outcomes and learning to perform retrobulbar blocks.



On Saturday afternoon after seeing post op patients, we had a chance to visit the Copan Mayan Ruins which are only an hour from the Manos Amigos Clinic. We enjoyed a guided tour of the ruins and weren't deterred by a little rain!



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

Alcon 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.

Hanes corporation provided a generous donation for this trip, and supplied interpreters.

We received generous support from **individual donors** who have given to support this brigade and the WakeECHO effort, including **Dr. Brian Foster** who has given so much of his time, resources and passion 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** who always welcomes us and provides hospital, clinic and OR staff to assist us. CEO Oscar Santos shares our passion for fighting blindness in Honduras and has been instrumental in helping us expand our efforts to La Entrada, including arranging for two of the nurses from the Manos Amigos clinic to come to Fraternidad to learn how to assist with cataract surgery.

Our new friends at the **Manos Amigos Clinic**, including medical director **Dra. Delmy Sanchez** who helped with planning and logistics to make our first trip an excellent experience; optometrist **Karen Murillo** who takes great care of the patients in La Entrada; **Dra. Dayana Urbina**, a retina specialist from San Pedro Sula who helped with the post operative care of our patients; **Carlos** who transported our team safely each day; and the nurses **Melissa, Asalia** and **Irma** who were fast learners and a lot of fun to work with.

We are also grateful to **Mike Tysowsky** and **Serving at the Crossroads** for reaching out to us and for their amazing work helping the lives of the poor in Honduras through the Manos Amigos clinic. Additionally we appreciate the help of **Dr. Randy Rottman** and **Vision Health International**, who provided valuable advice and shared supplies for this trip. We look forward to working together in our common goal of providing eye care to the underserved in Honduras.

With gratitude from the WakeECHO brigade 13 leaders,

Matt Giegengack, Levi Kauffman and Mike Evans