

SH Guatemala Trip Report

May 19-26 2024

Me, Roxanne, Chetti, Cecilia, Rehka Chaudhary, Sammy Chaudhary

I started out the trip in San Francisco presenting our work to ACOG in San Francisco. Went really well and we already have 6 OB/GYNs interested in coming on a trip.

I flew from San Francisco into Guatemala City on the evening of the 19th and arrived into Flores early on Sunday, May 20. Carmen and Kenneth met me at the airport.

1. Summary of Cervical cancer prevention part of trip:

168 patients

107 “conventional paps” read by Chetti and Mayra. Patients received results within an hour or 2
Of these, 97 were normal; 9 were high grade dysplasia and 1 was low grade. Of course, a 9% high grade number is insanely high (would be less than 1% in the U.S) but of course, we are now a referral center so the numbers are skewed

57 “thin prep” pap smears being brought back to ProPath labs

41 colposcopies

16 cervical biopsies

1 vulvar biopsy

1 endometrial biopsy

8 LEEP conizations

5 gyn consultations in addition to above

Overall progress in Cervical Cancer Program

Overall, our program seems to be growing substantially. Mayra has set up a document outlining requirements for nurses to get a “certificate” so they can do paps that SewHope will read. The “requirements” are pretty strict which is great but actually, there are already many nurses doing the paps in multiple places who have not gotten this certificate. Thus, the quality of many of the paps from these places is less than adequate and while this is frustrating, in truth this is a great leap forward. Mayra is working with these nurses to improve the quality; The patients at these clinics are receiving their paps in a very timely manner; SewHope is becoming more and more known throughout Peten; we are getting multiple referrals so that patients are getting diagnosed and treated. Although we face obstacles, if we can get more and more clinics in municipalities to perform the paps, our numbers will increase dramatically and many more patients will be saved.

Clinics that are sending paps include: San Francisco, Las Cruces, Hospital in San Benito, Sayaxche La Libertad, Naranjo, Melchor. Thus far, the greatest success has been in San Francisco, probably because it is geographically close, is well run and Mayra’s husband is the Director there.

Thus far, in 2024

1. Total of 3366 paps, colposcopies, biopsies, LEEP conizations
2. 3128 conventional paps
3. 190 Thin Prep

4. 42 colposcopy with biopsy
5. 41 colposcopy with no biopsy
6. LEEP 23
7. 8 endometrial biopsy
8. 9 cryotherapy

Our cytology lab is up and functioning very well. We received the official license this year. We currently have 6 functioning microscopes including one which Chetti brought on this trip which was donated by Dr. Mike Walsh from Promedica. One of the microscopes has a dual teaching head on it.

We are in the process of working with the medical school at the University of Puerto Rico and DaVinci University Guatemala to become a School of Cytology. On this trip, I had a meeting with Dr Lucky Hernandez, and representatives from the other 2 schools.

In the meeting, we discussed:

1. Roles of each us
2. They will send an agreement to be signed by all 3
3. Agree that clinical training will happen at SewHope facility
4. Students will be from Peten
5. We need to determine prerequisites. Right now, the only prerequisite in Guatemala to attend the “Roosevelt” school in Guatemala City is a high school degree (bachilaureate). That school is not open now. Of course, we intend to make our school much higher quality. To be determined what is needed before students enroll. ?Basic biology, chemistry? Other university classes?
6. Will there be tuition?
7. Curriculum
8. Will set up next meeting within next couple of weeks

Overall Staff issues

Director changes

1. The transition with having 3 separate directors with no overall “Executive Director” is not going well. Carmen came to me in tears at the beginning of the week because she feels that she no longer has a good relationship with Mayra and that Mayra is unwilling to share any of her information. She feels that Mayra is undermining her efforts.
2. Mayra was talking to Seiner about Carmen when I happened to come up to them. Mayra said that she is frustrated because Carmen now has an “attitude” and is not working with her. Mayra says that all the employees agree about this – feel that Carmen is a boss and speaks too harshly.
3. Cecilia and I had a long talk with Mayra about
 - a. Perhaps the change was made too quickly without a lot of thought going it into and a lack of clear roles
 - b. Mayra feels that Dr. Lucky really doesn’t understand how things work at SewHope and so she shouldn’t be designating roles. Apparently, she had a meeting with them without any of us included and it seems to have made things worse
 - c. Cecilia and I emphasized to Mayra that she really needs the time to do all the work on the Cervical Cancer prevention and that is a crucial project. We also said that this is her opportunity to share her wealth of knowledge with Carmen for the greater good of SewHope
 - d. Cecilia pointed out how she and Emily communicate regularly and although they have different roles, their work overlaps tremendously and the more they support each other, the greater success.
 - e. After the meeting, Mayra talked with me and I sensed that things will improve.

Community Development staff issues

1. Carmen and Marcelo are doing a great job with the public health projects and they are going far better than previously. However, Carmen feels that if she had a helper with experience in this area, we could do far more. She is very busy with the administrative issues and Marcelo is limited in what he does. Kenneth previously worked with us as a guard but he has extensive experience in this area. He left SewHope because he needed a higher salary than he was getting as a guard. He is currently working with "Asecso" which is a non-profit organization committed to improving the environment. They do a lot of work with reforestation, stoves, clean water. Kenneth explained how they go into communities, do assessments, work with the community to prioritize needs. He expressed being very excited about the possibility of working with us. He said he would need a minimum of Q5000 per month. He is going to put together a proposal that we can review to decide if it would be beneficial to hire him.

At our next board meeting, we need to discuss possibility of hiring Kenneth

Cervical Cancer staff (Mayra, Sandra, Bianay)

Mayra and Sandra continue to be outstanding in this work. They have great rapport with patients, with community. They both are making strong collaborations throughout Peten. They both follow through and are extremely committed to this work

Bianay is always pleasant and kind to the patients. She makes numerous mistakes and is very sloppy in her work. I have talked with Mayra about her before and Mayra agrees that she is slow to learn and very careless but she is good at taking paps and she is willing to put in the long days on jornadas. She gets along well with the staff. We decided not to make any changes at this time.

Education Program

Roxanne will give the full report. I will only mention that we (me, Roxanne, Mayra, Seiner, Carmen) met with 2 representatives from the Ministry of Education. It was an extremely pleasant and fruitful meeting. They were overflowing with compliments about the work we do in health and education for the community and they want to do what they can to help us continue to help these communities. The biggest surprise was when I told them that I took full blame but that we did not understand that we could not break the grades into morning and afternoon. I said that we expected a "no" answer but we thought we would ask if there was any way that we could split up the grades until we have the chance to construct more classes. They said that we could until 2026. They did talk a lot about how they think the extended day (from 7 till 2:30) is very good for the children and gives us an opportunity to do so much more. They would like to see that continue and we said that we will work on figuring out how to split the day without sacrificing the strides we have made. Roxanne will brief you all on the rest of their discussion and the progress of the children as well as "movie night"!

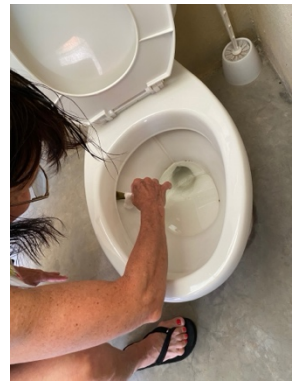
Overall, this was an outstanding trip! I think that Rehka and her son, Sammy really had many great opportunities to use their talents and to get many experiences which made them realize what we do, the obstacles we face and the tremendous needs of these people. Rehka was a wonderful help in the clinic. She helped with "check-in", with taking BP and blood sugars. She did many breast exams on patients. She went out into the communities when the stoves were installed and really go to witness the heart breaking poverty. Both she and Sammy brought a ton of laughs and comradery to the group! For a teen of 17, Sammy was so mature and insightful. He thanked us so much and I hope this experience will help him shape his future. He clearly has many talents and has much to offer this world! Cecilia of course was everywhere, always! She

seems to always be available when anything is needed and she is always the voice of reason! She kept us on task with recording our work and getting photos and stories out there that can be used going forward.

And of course, Chetti was invaluable as always. She becomes tearful at times talking about how we have grown since back in the day when she was running around in the rain with a microscope! She worked a lot with Mayra teaching and reinforcing and especially focused on how we can continue and improve quality control.

Some trip highlights:

1. The panic on Cecilia's face when she found a frog in the toilet! It became a morning emergency! I think that the guard thought she was panicking about a snake so he came armed with a large stick. I think he was a bit surprised to see the level of emergency we had created from seeing frogs legs! Chetti came to the rescue but was out maneuvered by the guard whom we fear decapitated the frog. Moral of the story: bring West Virginians with you when you travel.



2. Definitely a high: A 35 year old woman came in for a pap. She brought in her 4 year old daughter and said to me "May I present Sofia....she would not be here if it wasn't for you!" Well since I don't do any infertility treatments in Guatemala, I wasn't quite sure what she meant. So she said that she came to me for a "consult" 4 years ago. She had been trying to get pregnant for 7 years and had only had 2 miscarriages. She said that I offered to pray with her which we did. Apparently, 15 days later she had a positive pregnancy test! Well, not sure if this was pure luck, happenstance or her thinking positively but I'm going to toss it up to the power of prayer!!



3. Another huge high: Having such a fun group!



4. Watching Roxanne in a constant state of tears because she was so overcome with joy the whole week. Here she is at “movie night”!



5. Learning about how I need to change my diet from medical oncologist, Rehka



Hearing about patients who know have normal paps after being treated for previous high grade dysplasia



6. Movie night



