MERCY CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF SAVING LIVES IN THE YUCATAN

This article is part three of a four-series article. Look for its conclusion in the next edition of The Bulletin.

Each year, before the clinics in the Yucatan begin, the local hospital community hosts a ceremonial welcome to express their thanks and appreciation. Doctors Thomas Becker and David Hockmuth say it is hard not to be moved by people who have become a part of their lives.

“It is a great pleasure to see the faces of those we have cared for who are our friends,” Dr. Becker shared during the ceremony. “We are thankful for you and the doctors and medical staff here. Without their help, we could not have provided the care we have. Working together for 40 years, we have helped more than 1,100 children. We look forward to the new patients we will see during this visit. They will become new friends.”

Then Dr. Becker had a request of the audience. “I would like to have all of the children and their parents helped by the Mercy program to stand to be recognized.” In the large auditorium, more than 80 percent of those attending rose. Clapping began and cameras were raised to capture the moment. “Seeing all of the people rise was amazing,” said Dr. Hockmuth. “It felt good to realize how many people have been helped.”

From there, the blended medical teams began performing the examinations and screenings as efficiently as possible. The children most in need were chosen for surgery, while potential patients were placed on a list to be followed closely by local physicians.

“Seeing all of the people rise was amazing. It felt good to realize how many people have been helped.”  - Dr. Hockmuth

During the last 40 years, some aspects of the program have changed and improved. Hospital facilities and equipment have advanced, and physicians in Mexico are making progress in performing pediatric heart surgeries. Dr. Hockmuth shared there is still much to teach and learn, so local surgeons and doctors can become more successful in performing the types of surgeries.

During this year’s trip, some surgeries were performed in Mexico, as the Iowa physicians mentored their counterparts.

“We have been heading this direction for some time,” said Dr. Hockmuth. “We are getting closer to a time when they will be able to provide most of their surgical heart care, but right now our support is still very important.”

One thing that has not changed is the need. The Yucatan is home to 16 million people. Though the economy has improved, Drs. Becker and Hockmuth say access to surgery and care for congenital heart defects is still out of reach for the average family. Quality care is available in Mexico City, but very few families can afford the expense. This continues to make the services provided by Mercy, Pediatrics Cardiology, PC, and Iowa Heart Center vital to the health of the children in the Yucatan Peninsula.

40th trip to Yucatan. Dr. Thomas Becker, with the help of Mercy's interpreter Katherine Langan, welcomes families in Campeche, Yucatan, Mexico, before they start clinical visits this past February.
“YOU MUST BE THE GUNNS FROM IOWA”

Winner of the Spirit of Mercy trip to Ireland shares her experience

Standing in front of the House of Mercy on Baggott Street in Dublin, Ireland, Spirit of Mercy Award winner Shawna Gunn and her husband, Matthew, prepared to tour the site where the mission of the Sisters of Mercy began.

With the Sisters away for the day, special arrangements had been made to have volunteers serve as tour guides. But suddenly, two Sisters appeared in the distance and hurried their pace to meet the couple. Upon their arrival they exclaimed — “You must be the Gunns from Iowa! We’ve heard so much about you.” Following hugs and warm wishes for an enjoyable stay, the Sisters were off again.

“The experience was very warm and welcoming,” said Shawna. “It was a total surprise.”

As a nurse, Shawna demonstrates the core values of reverence, integrity, compassion and excellence as she cares for patients on 7 South. Shawna says her Spirit of Mercy Award nomination by a nurse she looks up to was very humbling. “I did what all nurses do,” she said. “We worked together to provide the best care for all of our patients and we motivated each other every day.”

On the tour, Shawna saw artifacts from The Venerable Mother Catherine McAuley and the Sister’s humble beginnings. She also learned of challenges that faced Mother Catherine and her Sisters of Mercy. “Catherine’s commitment to helping the poor and those at-risk was not always popular,” said Shawna. “Sometimes it led to additional challenges, but it didn’t stop her efforts to care for those in need.”

Shawna feels Catherine’s resolve is definitely a part of Mercy – Des Moines today. When she joined Mercy in 2008, Shawna says she liked the idea of working for a faith-based organization. “It can help to have that extra direction as a guide,” said Shawna. “In the acuity and pace of our work, you can lose sight of what’s truly important. We’re fortunate to have the work of Catherine and the Sisters there to remind us.”

With the challenges facing health care and people in need of services, Shawna feels it’s important for everyone to be involved in serving others. “We all have an opportunity to take part in some great outreach efforts at Mercy,” said Shawna. “Not everyone needs health care, but our leadership does a great job of identifying additional needs where we can make a difference. Helping others was important in Catherine’s time and it is just as important today.”

NEURODIAGNOSTIC TECHNOLOGIST’S WEEK IS APRIL 15-21

This week, the six neurodiagnostic technologists at Mercy’s central campus are recognized for their commitment to their profession. This group is responsible for performing electroencephalograms (EEG), which are used to assess brain activity. They also perform neuro intraoperative monitoring, which tracks brain and nerve function during various spine and brain surgeries. In addition, they perform video nystagmography (VNG) to assess dizziness and evoked potential studies in which the nerve pathways are tested.

CONTACT US

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If you are interested in submitting information to be printed in the Bulletin, send it to PR and Marketing or call 515-247-3050.

Pictured left to right: Lyubov Lazovich, R. EEG T.; Kristi Northway; Catherine Weaver, CRE; Amanda Reysack, R. EEG/EP T., CNIM; Ashley Harris, R. EEG T., RSPGT, CNIM; Miriam Fox, R. EEG/EP T., CNIM.