



VOSH-CT San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua January 10-18, 2020

VOSH-Connecticut held its seventeenth annual eye care clinic in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua on January 10-18, 2020. This was the twentieth year of service at this site to the San Juan del Sur area, the seventeenth under the auspices of VOSH-Connecticut, along with three previous missions under the auspices of VOSH-NECO. The team consisted of 35 mission members, half of what we had in our previous past mission in 2018.

As in years past, approximately 70 local volunteers assisted with the mission. Dra. Rosa Elena Bello supervised the mission and the local volunteers as she has done for the past 20 years, and many local volunteers were now able to assist throughout the mission as translators. The mission was challenging as we saw almost as many patients in 2020 as we had seen in our last mission in 2018 with half of the mission volunteers that we had been with previously. In addition to the 3,300 pairs of glasses purchased by VOSH-Connecticut from the Virginia Lions Club, 4,000 pairs of sunglasses & 1,000 pairs of readers were purchased by VOSH-CT.

As we started a number of years ago, each mission member was asked to transport one supply bag and most mission members as part of the transport team arrived in Managua on the same day & time per our request to assure that everything got through at one time. There continues to be no choice but to mandate that anyone transporting a bag must arrive with the group or whatever they have will be taken at customs, which again presented a problem as 2 students arrived earlier than the group and attempted to go through customs at which point their trial lens sets were immediately confiscated necessitating over an hour of negotiation to finally get them released. In addition, the majority of the group arrived in Managua on January 10th at 12:15 p.m. and MINSA approval was not granted until 12:41 p.m., which also made it more difficult to timely proceed through customs and depart. We also experienced intermittent power outages throughout the week due to extremely high winds and blowing dirt and dust, which brought challenges to the clinic with limited lighting trying to see patients after dark with the entire town in a black out on Monday evening.

The clinic was held for the twentieth year at the Centro Escolar Enmanuel Mongalo y Rubio. It was set up Sunday, January 12th, 2020 with 6 examination rooms, a dispensary & lunchroom. Over the four-day clinic period, we saw 4,013 patients, averaging about 1,000 patients per day and the total number of patients now seen over the last 17 years exceeds 52,000.

Escalating mission costs continue to present a challenge. Total mission expenditures now exceed \$15,000 per mission, funded primarily through volunteer donations and mission fees. Distribution and baggage reimbursement fees exceeded \$2,000 for this mission, which will have to be factored into for the future as mission costs continue to escalate.

San Juan del Sur and the surrounding areas have experienced great economic difficulty and challenges over the past 2 years, and the need for eyecare was even greater since we were unable to attend to our annual clinic January 2019. Despite the State Department Level 3 Security Alert we were able to provide services this year without incident although we did witness at least 2

large crowd demonstration groups during our time there. In addition, I was detained twice by security for “random security checks” while trying to depart.

VOSH-CT continues to be grateful to all of those, both here and in Nicaragua, who work together as one to provide eye care services to so many who otherwise would have none.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Blondin

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Clinic Director

January 31, 2020

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