

Roca Blanca Medical Mission Base reports – January 2023

January 13, 2023

We are here safe and sound for a little over a week and here's our first report.

It was my first day in the clinic, and Dave was recuperating from Covid in our room. As I walked into the pharmacy/nursing area, I heard a loud cry coming from a patient room. The nurse came out, having just cleaned and bandaged a wound on the ankle from a fall from a bicycle. The cry persisted and escalated, not from physical pain, but clearly from fear and anguish. Within a minute, I could feel my heart and my spirit drawn to her and her plight. As I listened to her, I heard little tidbits from the staff: "she is almost 4 and did not speak until she was 3"; she sucks her tongue and her fingers and has a metal plate in her mouth"; "the mother was in the US and speaks English."

Finally the crying stopped, and I imagined the little girl had fallen asleep from exhaustion. By this time, I was feeling a very strong need to talk to this mom, though I had not seen her or the child as patients. I found them in the prayer room with Brother Jesus. I hovered around the door to the prayer room for 20 minutes. When the prayer was done, I asked if I could come in and talk to her (the mom, the child was sleeping). I said, "I don't know you or your little girl, but her cry affected me deeply and I just want to learn more about her." She said okay. She spoke and understood English well. My instinct told me that the girl did not hear well, and likely did not even hear the soothing words the nurse was saying to her. Hearing loss can delay speech development. She had also walked quite late, and had poor fine motor skills (eg holding a crayon), but was excellent at doing puzzles. She was in a pre-K kind of class, and had few social skills, really didn't know how to approach others, or play games with them. When I asked the mom if she thought the child had trouble hearing, she said, "I don't really know. I do yell a lot, and she won't sit while I read a story to her." She confessed she was aware that her child was "different", but wasn't sure how to pursue that. The school had no resources to evaluate or help her, and she didn't know how to go about getting help.

With tears in my eyes, I realized that this reminded me of my childhood with years of profound hearing loss, and the assumption that I "was not very bright." It was not until I was almost run down by a horse that my parents realized I could not hear well. This prompted multiple visits to doctors, treatments of many ear infections (not much in the way of antibiotics, but they could drain pus from behind the ear drums), and then in school I sat in the front row and the school paid for me and another child to learn lip-reading. Retrospectively, it was like being let out of jail, and although I have ongoing hearing loss, I was able to learn and have a normal life. Her cry, to me, was a cry for help and safety that touched my heart and my spirit.

My next patient, Abigail, 10 years old, was complaining of "ear pain". She was very vague about it, when it began, had she had it before-really was unable to answer any questions about it. Her exam was, not surprisingly, totally normal. By now, I was quick to ask about possible hearing problems. When did she first speak?" Age 5". How is she doing in school?" She hasn't learned anything", though she is now in 4th grade. She cannot read. She has 2 siblings who are apparently progressing in school normally. The mother was not terribly helpful in giving history, but her concern was genuine. There was probably a bit of a language problem, though I had an excellent translator who also had difficulty understanding the responses.

So, two young girls in one day who may have hearing problems contributing to some developmental delay certainly caught my attention. The causes or circumstances that can contribute to developmental delay are many, and the evaluation of this can be complicated. For whatever reason, (probably my own history), I zoned in on hearing loss as a possible factor. Thankfully, we actually have a machine to measure hearing loss and someone trained to use it, so we can begin there. If there is indeed significant hearing loss, then referral to a specialist could help. We also need to have a psychological evaluation for developmental delay, family history, family situation and supports etc.

Thankfully, there is someone on the base who may be able to help us determine what kind of resources are available in this area of Oaxaca.

It certainly felt like the Lord was orchestrating my first two consultations, counting on my remembering my childhood experiences with hearing loss to galvanize me into action.

Blessings to all of you! Dave and Mary Kay Ness Web: <https://rocamission.com/corbanclinic/what-we-do/>
Dave daness77@aol.com and Mary Kay Ness 65mtn01@gmail.com

January 23, 2023

QUARANTINE: Until a few years ago with Covid, not a common word. I remember it from the polio that frightened our nation in the '50's. This past Christmas time MK & I got Covid, first time. We learned the word in Vermont with family; then again in Mexico when the rebound infections got us again. I got it first, but MK followed shortly after she had worked in the clinic for two days and saw the four year old she suspected of hearing loss. We quarantined; there is no Covid here and we didn't want to introduce it. We were well and began work on January 16.

REST: My neighbor back in Honeoye Falls shared some encouraging words from a book entitled "Sacred Rest." My quarantined self needed to hear them. When God spoke the world into being, He created man on day six. Man's first full day on earth he was commanded to rest; it wasn't a suggestion. Amidst all my busyness taking time to rest and wait on God is wisdom. I mustn't try to complete in the flesh what I had begun in the Spirit; God brought us here, but I needed to wait for the full healing and not press ahead with my will.

OUTREACH: On January 13th a medical brigade went to Bocavilla, without us, as we were on quarantine. The long day presented 85 patients and much ministry. The next outreach is in February.

CLINIC: This week gone by has been moderately busy at the clinic. Our working in the clinic provides the Mexican doctor (medical director) some relief, as he is also pastor of the Cacalote church here. As Spanish comes back to us, I am aware that my wife has better command of the language than I. But we seldom need help translating. Commonly seen are folks with colds, sore throats, infections of ears or bladder, sprains, arthritis, pregnancy care. There were a few more exotic infections—dengue and typhoid; the woman with typhoid was promptly removed from her work in the kitchen. I saw a 73 year old man with faintness. He was so hard of hearing I put my stethoscope in his ears and spoke loudly into the bell: "You need to drink more than your usual half liter of water a day." Chronic dehydration is a frequent cause of dizziness, faintness, and weakness in this subtropical heat with lots of direct sun.

PASTORS: Today, Saturday the 21th, a pastors' conference is wrapping up. Attendance is about 500, counting other church workers and their families along with the pastors, all from the some 55 churches planted by this mission base through its Bible school trainees over the years since the early 90's. Scores of tents have erupted across campus and inspirational speakers have been brought in from across Mexico.

BIRTHDAYS: They are celebrated here. Mary Kay turned 80 on Friday the 20th and the clinic put on a big morning meal with decorations, cake, hugs, prayers, and presents. Tonight we plan a meal out with two other couples, three birthdays within a 2 week span.

SPIRIT GUIDANCE: We were walking in the village in search of a present. At the last store a woman stepped out who was mother of the four year old Mary Kay had suspected of hearing loss. We learned that the hearing test had not been scheduled. MK will follow up with the clinic nurse who does these tests. Tenacity is MK's middle name.

January 30, 2023

Adjustment - MK: Every year that we come to Roca, the process of adjustment is different. The weather is beautiful and warm, and it is always wonderful to see friends again. That is exhilarating. This year, because we lost 10 days of being with people because of Covid, it was a bit more difficult to become adjusted to the routine in the clinic. We love being doctors and taking care of patients, and have had a lot of experience. But, for us, even after 20 years of coming to Roca Blanca every year, and some good formal education in Spanish, it is a challenge to become comfortable asking questions in Spanish, and even more of a challenge understanding the answers in Spanish. Even if we suggest that they speak "*mas despacia*" (slowly), they will try for 10-20 seconds and then go right back to their usual rapid speech. But they are always respectful, and are willing to try to answer the same question asked a little differently. And there is almost always someone around who can translate for us—this year we have one young woman who is a second year medical student and speaks excellent English, and another college student as well. Also there are a fair number of English speaking students who are attending the Spanish School here, run by David Nelson, and when they have a medical problem they can see us and are often relieved that we speak English as well. So now we are two weeks into seeing patients.

Birds - Dave: Perhaps this paragraph is for birders especially, but the marvelous ecosystems along the Pacific coast are a treasure of God's creation, with much diversity. We can watch the brown pelicans dive for fish from our back porch, cormorants and gulls as well. And the magnificent frigate birds soar high on the air currents along the coast, and out to the rock (Roca Blanca) where boobies also nest. But the richest area seems to be the lagoons, one of which is about a half mile away. It's a remnant of the rainy season, when the Cacalote River sought an outlet through the beachhead to the ocean, but was diverted to the right and left some ponding which is gradually drying up. We have walked there maybe a half dozen times now, and every time we have spotted new birds. The Great Blue Herons and turkey vultures might be from our region, but the ibis, night herons, caracara, stilts, anhingas, cormorants, jicanas, and parrots are not, (nor the crocodile). East of here, maybe 20 minutes, is a larger permanent lagoon some 6 miles long, as the Mantieltepec River flows into it even throughout the dry season. There, one morning a few years back, we saw over 60 species of birds, including a boat billed heron colony in among the mangroves.

Clinic - MK: Last year, it seemed as if every other patient had Covid. That diagnosis also required treatment, but because there are so many students here who live in dormitories, there was also often logistical maneuvering to move sick students to rooms to be together, and well students to be together- felt like musical chairs at times. This year it is "*tos y gripa*"- cough and runny nose, with very few complications like pneumonia or asthma. So then we have had to become familiar with what medicines we have for treating cough and cold symptoms. They have some pretty good medicines here for these symptoms, but, especially for children we need to figure out the dosage of the liquid medicines-how many mg/kg, and how many mg/ml and how many ml/dose and so on. It can take as long to figure out the dosing for children as it takes to see the patient. All patients go for prayer with Jesus, our prayer warrior, and then they can go get the medicine. So far at least this year, I have not seen anyone with hypertension or diabetes, very common diseases here. I suspect that will change in the next week or so.

Reading and Reflection - Dave: Down here, isolated from the routines of home, it seems easier to read. I knew I had to try reading Francis Schaeffer again, his trilogy: "The God Who is There", "Escape from Reason", and "He is There and He is not Silent". I struggled with his philosophical approach last year, and I found his diagrams of the "Line of Despair", with content above and below the line, a little too daunting and confusing for me. But as I wrestled with it again this year I appreciated better how it explained so much of the worldview I grew up with, and the worldview which also influenced my children and their generation. And I realized how powerful and true our personal infinite God is, and how He has spoken to us throughout history, including His appearance in flesh in the form of His Son, and then the gifting of the person of the Holy Spirit. He has spoken, and continues to speak. He has told us what is good and what is bad. Since humans are created in His image, we do have a relationship to Him and we are not autonomous; we are finite and similar to other parts of His creation. By our own actions we have become separated from Him, but He has provided a new covenant whereby we can come back into relationship with Him.

Young woman with ? cancer - Dave: Among the good people I saw this week was a 38 year old woman who had been unable to swallow any solid foods or even pills for months, possibly going on a year. Liquids would go down okay. She did not feel sick otherwise but had lost a lot of weight. Her weight just topped 100 lbs., and the veins in her forearms were quite prominent. For me, her situation brought into bold relief how people often deal with a medical problem here. I will embellish her dilemma to include things she might have said if we had talked more in depth, plus things we have heard from other people. Not impoverished enough to qualify for the Mexican equivalent of our Medicaid, she avoided going to the doctor for some time, not wanting to use her scarce resources until absolutely forced to. Not being aware of the possible diagnosis of cancer in her situation probably contributed to her delay. She did see another doctor before seeing me. To paraphrase what this doctor said: "You need to go to Oaxaca City for endoscopy." There are very limited specialist services throughout the state of Oaxaca, but the city of Oaxaca is the go to medical mecca. While this was an appropriate medical recommendation, it further prevented her from pursuing care. Endoscopy would most likely reveal the problem, enable a biopsy if appropriate, and perhaps even treatment if she has a stricture. But, in addition to the cost of endoscopy (beyond her reach), it would entail a 6 hour trip by car or bus, meaning time away from home (children and possible employment, or care of livestock) and additional expense. Most people who come to our clinic do not have a car. Perhaps she came here looking for a less threatening diagnosis, perhaps she is a woman of faith seeking healing prayer, perhaps she was looking for a donation to cover expenses (something done not infrequently here). So I was able to help her accept an X-ray study (an Upper GI with a barium swallow) in a local city 40 minutes away. This is likely to reveal what is causing her difficulty swallowing, and threatening her life. After that we can pursue next steps.



Dave and Mary Kay at work in Mexico: <https://rocamiission.com/corbanclinic/project/minor-surgeries/>