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Newsletter February 2025

We have just completed our sixth Aid Via Action Short Mission Trip (6th AVASMT) since our organization was founded in April 2021. It has truly been a wonderful trajectory so far and we continue to learn, improve, and bring new services to those in need. Notably, during our many trips, the number of laparoscopic cholecystectomies continues to increase with a concomitant decrease in the number of open cases (**Table 1**).

We are proud to announce that the urology program continues to gain strength with more cases and more complex operations substantially increasing. Additionally, during this 6th AVASMT we held the [Inaugural International Conference on Anesthesia and Surgery](#), which was a tremendous success. None of it would be possible without the tremendous help of all the volunteers and our board of directors, local surgeons and staff.

THE TEAM FOR THE 6TH AVASMT

For this trip, we had three urologists that continue to strengthen the program at Hospital Nacional de San Benito (HNSB). All the equipment to perform transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP) is now available at HNSB, which was made possible by Chirs Cole who has been tremendously pivotal in this endeavor.

I was fortunate that my good friend Dr. Carol Kashefi elected to participate for the second

consecutive time for this AVASMT. She was instrumental in guiding the two new urologists to the site. Additionally, Dr. Kashefi recruited Dr. Diana Kang who performed two complex vesicovaginal fistula takedowns on two young women who had complications following hysterectomies. These women were suffering from these fistulas for several months. Without the presence of our urologists at the site and the expertise of Dr. Kang, the only alternative for these women would have been to be referred to a hospital in Guatemala City for which their care would have been substantially delayed. They would also need to be in a location without the support of their families for the operations and for the recovery.

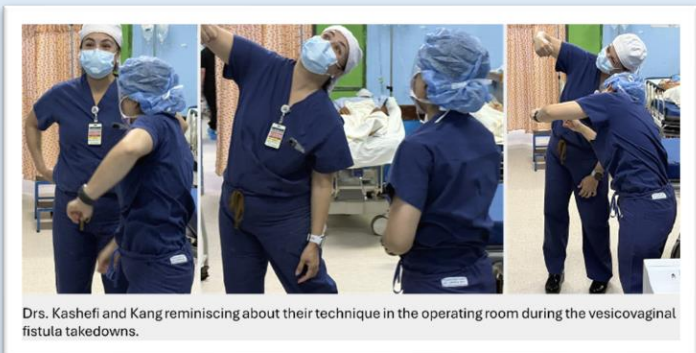
Dr. Kolosseus, Kashfi, and Kang also performed seven TURPs for the much-needed service of the patient population of El Petén. This service continues to be in high demand according to the



Participants			SMT #	Cases									
AVA	Local	TOTAL		Ing Hernia	Lap Chole	Open Chole	UH	Vent Hernia	Lipoma	Other	UROLOGY	TOTAL	
14	6	20	1	11	10	7	0	0	1	0	0	29	
9	4	13	2	11	8	4	1	0	1	0	0	25	
4	7	11	3	7	6	4	3	0	2	0	0	18	
11	8	19	4	11	7	5	4	0	2	2	7	36	
6	10	16	5	10	10	5	2	2	2	2	6	39	
12	6	18	6	8	9	4	1	1	1	2	9	35	
56	41	97	TOTAL	58	50	29	11	3	9	6	22	182	

Table 1. List of Cases during six short mission trips to Hospital Nacional de San Benito.

Director of the hospital (Dr. Cesar Ortiz). During the first few days of the AVASMT, Dr. Ortiz informed me that there was a patient with phimosis requiring a circumcision for which Dr. Kashefi promptly responded with a resounding “yay! would love to do the case”.



Drs. Kashefi and Kang reminiscing about their technique in the operating room during the vesicovaginal fistula takedown.

We were very lucky that we had four anesthesia providers helping us during this trip along with the anesthesia group at HNSB. Dr. Eric Jonson and Secherre Michaelis, CRNA (both members of our board or directors) have not only participated in 50% of the SMTs that we have held in El Petén, but are also excellent recruiters of other anesthesia providers, which is a needed service at HNSB.



Both Secherre and Eric have been in three of the six AVA SMTs to HNSB. They are also excellent in recruiting other anesthesia providers.

Two additional anesthesia providers were able to join us during this trip. Dr. Joy Chen and Sally Sullivan, CRNA. Dr. Chen is the director of the intensive care unit at the hospital where I work. She is also an anesthesia provider at our siter institution in Dallas. In addition to assisting with the anesthesia needs at HNSB during the week, she was

also a presenter at our inaugural conference. Notably, she delivered the entire talk in Spanish. Her Spanish was clearly much better than mine. I also attempted to deliver my talk in Spanish but was not entirely successful.



Sally Sullivan, CRNA reached out to Secherre to come and help us during this trip. People are hearing about the work that we do in El Peten.

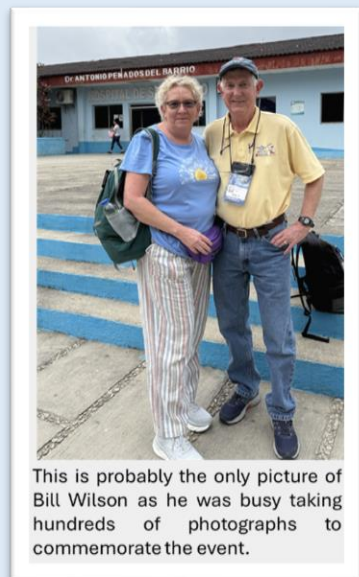
Dr. Chen, as the rest of the anesthesia team, were quick to adopt the standard practice of providing regional anesthesia to this patient

population, which is much more common compared to hospitals in the United States. Sally was a tremendous addition to the team and quickly adapted to anesthesia delivery at HNSB.



Dr. Chen getting ready for a regional block

We were fortunate that Gina Wilson, RN (also a member of our board of directors) was able to join us for this trip. Her presence was important in understanding the care of patients in the post-anesthesia care unit (PACU), which today is limited at HNSB. She purchased blood pressure devices, pulse oximeters, and thermometers to leave in the hospital such that they are available to the PACU staff in the future. An added bonus of Gina



This is probably the only picture of Bill Wilson as he was busy taking hundreds of photographs to commemorate the event.

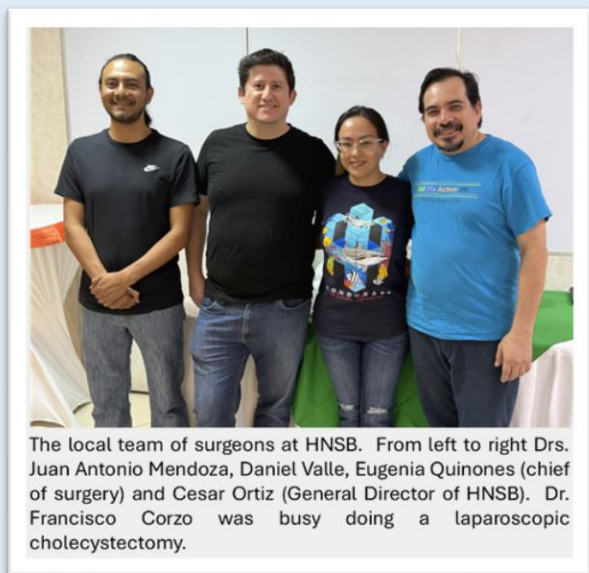
coming with us was accompanied by her husband Mr. Bill Wilson, who was probably the busiest individual of this AVASMT. He was always busy capturing all the monumental events throughout the AVASMT and the symposium. Bill's passion and talent in photography was enormous in capturing the historic events of this 6th AVASMT.

An additional member of our board of directors and a local surgeon of El Petén is my dear friend Dr. Anny Ochoa Hernandez. Her participation in these AVASMTs brings a great deal of talent, expertise, and humanity to our mission. I am particularly fortunate that she has been part of our board of directors and a friend since my early days of traveling to HNSB. She constantly assists with pediatric cases, for which her enthusiasm and talent are very much appreciated.



Dr. Anny Ochoa getting ready for an inguinal hernia on a 1-year-old girl. Her passion, and talent for these cases is instrumental to the mission of AVA.

AVA could not do this work (and we would not want to) without the tremendously talented group of surgeons and anesthesiologists at HNSB. One of the most important aspects of our work is the follow-up



The local team of surgeons at HNSB. From left to right (Drs. Juan Antonio Mendoza, Daniel Valle, Eugenia Quinones (chief of surgery) and Cesar Ortiz (General Director of HNSB)). Dr. Francisco Corzo was busy doing a laparoscopic cholecystectomy.

care of all patients that we operate on during each SMT. Thus, one of our rules is to have an AVA member operate with one of the local surgeons. Even for the urology cases, we always count on the presence of a member of the hospital.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Dr. Ortiz and I start working on these SMTs a few months prior to the event. But we could not do any of this without a tremendous number of individuals that work very hard to make this possible. I am especially thankful to Lic. Caleb Rodriguez, who works extremely hard to ensure that all AVA members have adequate transportation, are properly fed and that all the little details of the trip go according to plan. He was additionally burdened by Dr. Ortiz and me during this trip as he was pivotal in coordinating all aspects of the symposium.



Thank you, Caleb. We could not do it without you.

AVA is also grateful to all the operating room staff, the drivers, and every



The Operating Room Staff work extra hard during our AVASMTs to make it all happen. **Carlos Marin** is extremely helpful and resourceful obtaining many items that the members of the team need in the operating room.

single person who makes these AVASMTs extremely successful.

A DAY FOR R&R

We did not break tradition for this mission trip and all AVA members went to Tikal on Wednesday for a well-deserved day of rest. The best ruins in the world are characterized by the 3 M's: Masada in Southern Israel, Monte Alban in Oaxaca Mexico, and Machu Picchu, in Peru. Tikal is truly my number 4. It is a majestic site, and I do not allow anyone to come to this mission trip without visiting



After a few hours of hiking around the site, the whole group gets a nice lunch at one of the local restaurants just outside of Tikal.



I did not break tradition either and made the nearly 30-mile run from Flores to Tikal. The weather was perfect. It was PR for me for this course.

the site. It has not been a disappointment to anyone so far. Secherre, Eric, and Chris have been to the site for the second time, and I heard the same comments as the first time around "it is beautiful".



THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ANESTHESIA AND SURGERY: BRIDGING THE GAP ON HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES AROUND THE WORLD.

We continue to make history in El Petén. This AVASMT was no exception. We held the First International Symposium on Anesthesia and Surgery. This was a tremendous success!

Name	Specialty	Talk
Sergio Huerta, MD, FACS, HEC-C	General Surgery	Current Status of the Non-Operative Management of Acute Appendicitis in LMICs
Joy Lo Chen, MD, FASA, FCCM	Anesthesia	Post-Acute Sequelae of COVID-19
Dr. Cesar Augusto Ortiz Vargas	General Surgery	Experiencia con Pacientes con Pie Diabetico
Dr. Edgar Belteton	Pediatrics	Es mi manejo de Asma un error, mito o dogma?
Dr. Raut Sosa	Pediatric Surgery	Abordaje del Neumoperitoneo en Neonatos & Abordaje Diagnostico y Quirurgico De Las Hernias Umbilicales, Inguinales, Epigastricas en Pediatría
Dra. Lourdes Santizo	Surgery	Atencion de Pacientes Quemado Pediatricos
Dra. Gilda Lorean Izquierdo	Anesthesiology	Análisis de la jornada de fistula arteriovenosa Colecistostomia Laparoscopica: Una Alternativa en el Manejo de la Colecistectomia Difícil y su Manejo Post Operatorio
Dr. Victor Francisco Corzo	Surgery	Atelectasis, plastic bronchitis, and the middle lobe syndrome & Chronic Cough in Children
Bruce Rubin, MEngr, MD, MBA, FRCPC	Pediatrics	Atelectasis, plastic bronchitis, and the middle lobe syndrome & Chronic Cough in Children

In all, we had nine presenters who delivered 11 topics on anesthesia, surgery, and pediatrics. We had three participants from the United States including me. Dr. Joy Chen delivered an exciting talk on anesthesia post-Covid. Dr. Rubin is a professor and chair of pediatrics in Virginia who came all the way to Guatemala to deliver multiple talks throughout the country with a final stop in El Petén. Two surgeons and one anesthesiologist came from Guatemala to tell us about their experience with



From left to right: Drs. Corzo, Santizo, Huerta, Ortiz, Sosa, Izquierdo, Rubin and Belteton. Dr. Joy Chen was probably putting someone to sleep.

burns, pediatric surgery, and anesthesia in their respective hospitals. Drs. Ortiz and Corzo provided their experience with surgical local issues.

Attendance at the conference was phenomenal (90 physicians, nurses, and medical students were in the audience). Dr. Ortiz was able to provide 7-hours of continuing medical education (CME) to all Guatemalan participants. Next year, I will make arrangements such that the USA audience and participants can also claim credit. We were able to publish all the [abstracts](#) prior to the conference. This was a hybrid conference in English and Spanish. We made no effort to have interpreters, and this seemed to be just fine. We also published the abstract in a hybrid form in both English and Spanish. The aim of our [AVA Global Health Journal](#) is to have papers published from Central America and they will also undertake a hybrid from.

A DISTINGUISHED GUEST

We were fortunate to have a distinguished guest at the conference. Mrs. Sandra Edith Carballos Lemus was not only present at the conference but actively participated throughout the symposium. Sandra



Sandra Edith Carballos Lemus is the new viceministra de Hospitales del Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social (MSPAS) in Guatemala.

Edith Carballo Lemus is the new viceministra de Hospitales del Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social (MSPAS) in Guatemala. She made the trip to El Petén to learn about what we do with AVA and the symposium. We were all honored by her presence.

PRESS CONFERENCE

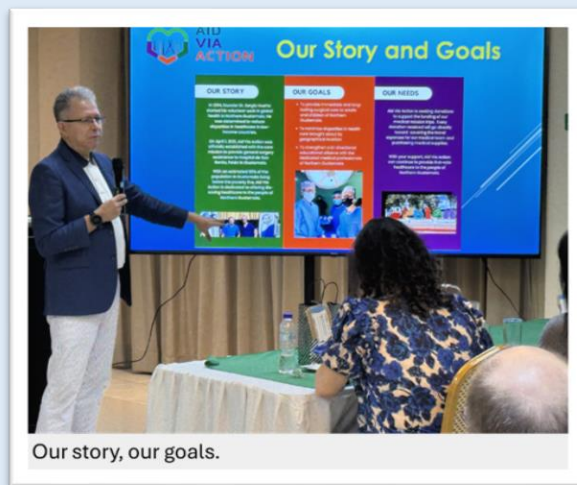
New for this trip as well was a press conference that we held just before orientation on Sunday prior to starting all activities on Monday morning.

It was very important to let people know where we have been, where we are today, and where we are going. A common question that I am asked by many people of the press and others is: “Why Guatemala? Why El Peten? I do not think I have a good answer to this, except to say “destiny!” If you want me to elaborate, we will need to have a conversation about it at some point.

AID VIA ACTION-PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Sergio Huerta, MD, FACS, HEC-C
 Professor of Surgery and Chief Ethics Consultant
 Aid Via Action Inc.
 President and CEO
 For the PRESS

Logo: AID VIA ACTION
 Logo: Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social Hospital de San Benito



In any event, the press conference was well received, and Dr. Ortiz and I accepted a number of questions from the press.

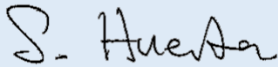


There is a palpable sense that Aid Via Action Inc. continues to generate an exponential presence in Guatemala. This is not by coincidence nor by accident. There are a tremendous number of people who work very hard to make this a success. I am

extremely grateful to my entire board of directors who work tirelessly to help others.

I am extremely grateful to all the people of Guatemala. I think Dr. Ortiz and I are doing something positive, but none of this, we do alone.

THANK YOU ALL!



Sergio Huerta, M.D., F.A.C.S., HEC-C
Aid Via Action Inc.
President & CEO

Our 3rd Annual AVA 5K run will take place Saturday September 27, 2025 @ 8:00 am at Bachman Lake. Registration for the race is already open. Do not forget to register.

I will see you all there!

3rd Annual AVA 5K.

[Register HERE](#)

