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CALENDAR

- February 25 - March 5, 2016**
Thanh Hoa, Vietnam
- February 12 - 21, 2016**
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

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One Partner's Story

by Michael Silvio, CSI Partner, Liberia 2013

I'd heard stories and seen pictures, but nothing quite compared with witnessing hundreds of families lined up in front of Duside Hospital, just outside Liberia's capital city of Monrovia, waiting patiently, hoping their prayers would be answered, their children's lives improved. Many had traveled long distances, mostly by foot, camping overnight on the hospital grounds with their children.

I had signed on as a CSI Partner, a program that offers the opportunity to travel with the team on a surgical mission. It's a way for non-medical people to support the organization in exchange for the experience of traveling and working alongside the team. While Liberia had not been on my travel bucket list, by the time I met the 27 enthusiastic and inspired team members at the airport, I never looked back.

I was anxious about what skills I had to offer the team but soon came to realize that CSI welcomes and utilizes all skills and applauds "can-do attitudes." In many ways I felt like I had the best job of the group - spending time in the nursery with pre- and post-op patients and their families. While rocking infants to sleep, I could see the warmth of Liberia in their faces. I felt privileged to be at the center of a family's life during a time of extreme stress, hope, and joy.

The local hospital staff, patients, and families share a common thread - a strong unwavering faith, a deep belief that radiates serenity, certainty, and security. Liberians appear to be blessed with an assuring, persevering calm - a feeling that everything will be fine. They put their trust in a group of complete strangers, testimony to the magnitude of their desire to cure their children.

One morning I met Siah as she was awaiting surgery. She was lonely, shy, and crying. Siah told me that her name meant first-born female in the family. I told her I was the first-born male in mine. I shared with her that when I was hospitalized as a child all I remember was going to sleep and waking up feeling better. We spent the morning talking, reading, and coloring. When they called her name, she asked if I would go into the operating room with her. I was allowed to stay with Siah until she was asleep. As she drifted off I told her I would be there when she woke up. The procedure went smoothly, and when she woke up in recovery I was by her side. I'll never forget her smile when she saw me and spoke my name. She wrote me a thank you note and drew a heart and cross on it; I still carry it with me.

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Michael spending time with patients in pre- and post-op.



Vietnam 2015: Successful Mission Leads to a 3-Year Biannual Commitment

by Sally Lannin

Thanh Hoa City, along Vietnam's Ma River, is in the heart of the country's poorest region. Many residents of the city, which is 150 km south of Hanoi, make their living working in the rice fields, some having done so since they were small children. Such is the case with Quach Thi's parents, who have brought in their 3-year-old daughter to be seen by CSI urologist Dr. Dave Vandersteen.

This is also true of Ngan Thi. Her parents are very poor and brought her to see ENT surgeons Dr. Raj Petersson and Dr. Chris Discolo. Her parents share with us that she is frequently mocked by her playmates.

Do Xuan's urological issues keep him from attending school regularly. He quietly plays with a balloon while waiting in pre-op for surgery.



Quach Thi and her mother are seen by Dr. Dave Vandersteen.

“Thanks to our partner IPSAC, whose NGO status allowed CSI to add Vietnam to the list of countries we serve.”

When CSI arrived in Thanh Hoa City this September, we anticipated screening 70 patients. But more than 200 children were waiting for us, thanks to advance work done by our partner IPSAC, whose NGO status allowed CSI to add Vietnam to the list of countries we serve. Our 30-person team sprang into action, screening, prioritizing, and scheduling patients.

The education and training our physicians and nurses provide on-site is time consuming but rewarding. Dr. Vandersteen estimates that it takes twice as long to perform a surgery if he is simultaneously training. By the end of the nine-day mission, over 50 children had received life-changing surgeries, several physicians participated in training, and more than 60 Vietnamese health-care professionals attended a pain management class taught by CSI nurses Katie Houle and Lora Koppel. In addition, we left with a commitment to return biannually for the next three years. The hospital and its professionals are eager to learn, and the need for this care in the region is great.

Thanks to a grant from the nonprofit Dollies Making A Difference, all children over age 6 who did not have insurance were able to avoid charges from the hospital in this communist country. A generous grant from the Sexton Foundation, as well as financial support from three CSI Partners who were also active mission team members, defrayed a large portion of CSI's costs for the trip. To become a CSI Partner and join us on a trip, visit www.childrenssurgeryintl.org.

CSI team members are already strategizing how to deal with the extreme demand for both surgery and training in Thanh Hoa when we return in February 2016. Though this was one of our most logistically challenging missions, the benefits of helping the people of Vietnam made CSI's first trip to the country hugely rewarding for everyone involved.



Ngan Thi



Do Xuan



CSI Partner Johnine Adomitis works with a translator to ask a father about his son's health concerns.

Patience and Perseverance In Hermosillo, Mexico: Two Stories of Hope

by Melanie McCall

CSI just completed its 11th surgical mission to Hermosillo, Mexico. I was privileged to be one of the 20 CSI volunteers on the mission, where we evaluated 106 children and performed 51 surgeries in three days. As one of two non-medical personnel on the trip, I was continually amazed at the skill and sensitivity shown by the doctors and nurses caring for these children. I am most amazed, however, by the Hermosillo mission's unique characteristic that allows us to develop long-term relationships with team members, local professionals and volunteers, and most importantly, these marvelous children who are our patients.



Maily and her abuela on the most recent mission.



Melanie and Maria

The fantastic partnership between CSI, the St. Andrew's Children's Clinic in Nogales, and CIMA Hospital in Hermosillo contributes heavily to these success stories. Because of the commitment of local professionals and volunteers in Hermosillo and Nogales, who assist with treatment during the course of the year following surgery, we are able to closely track patients and their progress. It's this continuum of care that enables CSI to offer not just a one-time cleft lip repair, but also important subsequent procedures as the child grows. This unique mission allows us to see the same child annually for possibly several years, making recommendations for speech therapy and other treatments along the way, and performing surgeries as needed to give each child the best chance at a healthy future.

Maily. Little Maily was an infant in 2013 when she came for repair of her cleft lip. We were drawn to her sweet disposition and the obvious closeness between her and her "abuela." I'm not sure who looked more nervous before surgery: Maily or her grandmother. By the time they left, however, Maily's cleft lip was repaired and everyone was all smiles. When the family returned to us for evaluation of Maily's progress in 2014, it was like greeting old friends. They were happy to see us, even when the doctors told them it would be best to wait another year before the next phase to repair her cleft palate.

Maily and her abuela returned this year, and Maily is now a laughing, confident and entertaining 3-year-old. The morning after her successful surgery, she was sitting up in bed, all too happy to pose for pictures and blow kisses to her team.

Maria Jose. Seventeen-year-old Maria Jose, whose personality is just as lovely as her appearance, "graduated" this year. Her seventh and final surgery was performed during the 2015 mission trip. Those of us who have been to Hermosillo on multiple missions feel a bit as though we have grown up with her, and it has been a privilege to watch her mature. Next year, she will return as a volunteer, assisting and comforting the next generation of those nervous first-time patients to the CSI mission.



Maily during a previous mission.



Maria after her last surgery



Children's Surgery International
825 Nicollet Mall Suite 706
Minneapolis, MN 55402
www.childrenssurgeryintl.org

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For more information or to make a donation:

Children's Surgery International

825 Nicollet Mall Suite 706

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Ten days passed quickly, and by the time we packed up more than 100 grateful families were heading home with big smiles and the excitement of sharing their experience and life-changing gifts. CSI volunteers are a special group of people, devoted to offering their energy and skills to children in need. I realized that while many lives in Liberia had been transformed, mine had been touched similarly.

I have a video on my phone from the day we left the hospital. I often watch it for a spirit boost, even after two years have passed. In it, staff, patients, and families are singing, clapping, and dancing to a spontaneous song. The chorus bellows "Thank You CSI, Thank You." I hum this tune often, as I smile and agree.

Thank you, CSI.