

Advanced training in the Andes

Medical missions for the developing world

By John and Bethanne Kinmonth

High on the formidable eastern slope of Pichincha, an active volcano overlooking Ecuador's capital city of Quito, medical professionals from all walks of life teamed up with Mission to the World to offer a free clinic in the poor, urban community of La Comuna Alta.

Punctuated by the frequent gunshot-like reports of firecrackers bursting over a nearby soccer match, doctors and nurses treated a steady stream of patients with a variety of conditions, ranging from the common cold to heart disease.

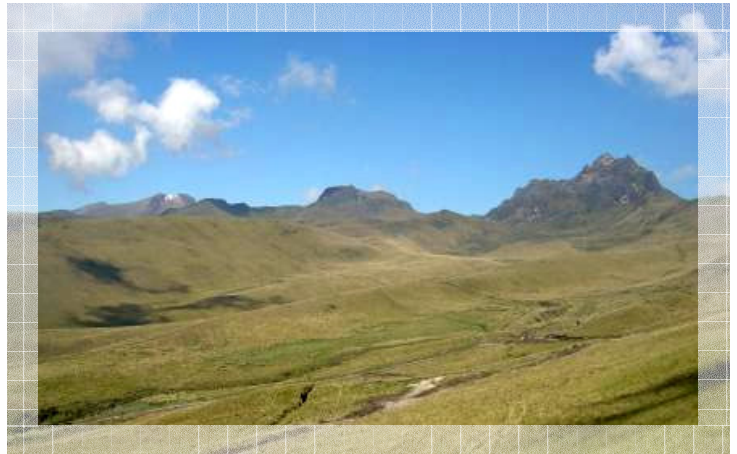
As part of MTW's week-long annual Advanced Medical Leadership Training, the clinic served as an opportunity for course attendees to get a hands-on feel for the medical world.

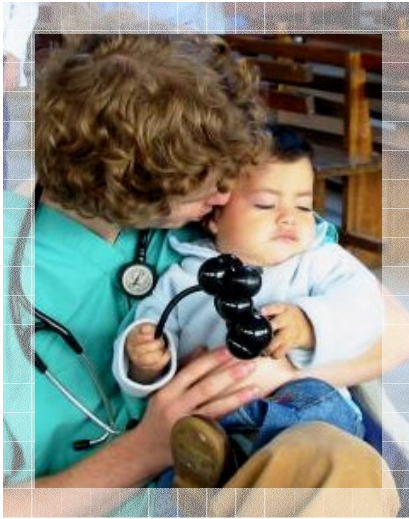
For the past several years, the intensive course has trained Christian medical professionals from the United States and other countries to lead or participate in the wide assortment of programs from disaster relief and clinical logistics to water purification and preparing fruit, the course attempts to prepare for every possible scenario in medical missions. Hosted by MTW's Ecuador team and led by eight experienced medical professionals including MTW medical directors Drs. Ted and Sharon Kuhn, attendees were also able to earn necessary "continuing medical education" credits through the Medical College of Georgia.

The urban clinic, held at San Pablo Church, came right on the heels of an even more crowded rural clinic at the Quichua church of Oyacato, a small indigenous town north of Quito. Serving over 125 patients, the volunteers were kept busy from morning until late afternoon. Team members served in several different capacities throughout the day: a community walk-through where team members assessed general community infrastructure and attempted to identify potential ongoing health risks, onsite lab work with the ability to run a variety of tests, short term treatment pharmacy, counseling, and leadership.

Dr. Mauricio Coronel, a local doctor in Quito who lent his expertise to the event, finds the free clinics beneficial because they help people who wouldn't normally receive treatment due to the long-lines and poor funding of the government-sponsored Ecuadorian hospitals. Dr. Coronel also serves as a follow-up liaison for those diagnosed with chronic or ongoing conditions.

Besides offering professional medical attention to patients, the team also brought a message of hope. After check-ups, it was common to see both doctor and patient bowed in prayer or engaged in a lively discussion on the meaning of grace.





Dr. Doreen Mar, a Washington D.C. area emergency room veteran and conference attendee, said she chose to work with MTW rather than another secular aid organization solely based on this “spiritual aspect.” Mar, a career non-resident medical missionary with MTW since 2001, has led and participated in teams throughout the world.

First-time attendee Dr. Robert Ford, a pediatric doctor from Macon, Georgia, found the conference to be extremely informative. “I have learned 70 to 80 percent more about how to take care of people in the developing world,” he said. “When you’re in a Third World country, you have to make your clinical diagnosis based on health care facilities in the area, which is different from the U.S. because there we have almost limitless possibilities.”

Although the lack of medical infrastructure creates a variety of difficulties for the traveling medical missionary, Ford sees this as a chance to grow in other areas.

“Prayer and healing takes more of a center stage instead of resources,” he said.

The day before the team flew out of Quito, Ford had no regrets about using his limited vacation time to attend the labor-intensive week:

“If you want to literally learn how to take the reigns on a project, you’re not going to find a more in-depth program.”



AMLT 2007 Faculty and Participants: *Prepared to Serve Around the World in Christ's Name*

