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Medical Mission Treats Ecuadorians Dr. Bo Johnson Serves as General Surgeon and Phlebologist

Billings, Montana September 18, 2008 - Between June 6, and June 15, 2008, the medical mission "Amigos de Salud" treated over 1,600 underprivileged Ecuadorian patients in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Joined by Dr. James L. "Bo" Johnson M.D. of Rocky Mountain Vein Clinic, the team of volunteer specialists treated those in need of surgeries, medical procedures, and hearing aids. For many poor Ecuadorians, the mission set up in a dilapidated military hospital was their only chance to receive quality health care.

The volunteer medical team set up a functioning modern medical facility in a run-down military hospital, flying in their own medical supplies from America. Dr. Johnson described the scene as "mildly organized chaos." A multicultural team including gynecologists, urologists, anesthesiologists and other specialists juggled performing their respective specialties alongside pitching in with chores, talking to patients, and helping other doctors. Thanks to his dual certification as both a Board Certified General Surgeon and a Board Certified Phlebologist, Dr. Johnson stepped out of his usual role as a full-time phlebologist and performed gallbladder removals and hernia operations, in addition to non-cosmetic vein care procedures in Ecuador.

"In a third-world country, we are their only chance to get relief from pain and suffering," said Dr. Johnson. With quality healthcare only truly available to very wealthy Ecuadorians, many poorer citizens would never see a trained physician if not for the traveling medical mission. Since the need for quality healthcare is so great, many physicians leave feeling they have not done enough – despite treating close to 1600 patients. "What we did was a drop in the bucket," he said, "Returning home, I was disappointed that I couldn't help more people."

The mission prioritized patients so that they care for the most serious cases first. Local healthcare professionals notified the people of Guayaquil that physicians would be arriving so that patient hopefuls could sign up in advance. When the mission arrived, patient candidates were screened at the military hospital and prioritized according to their conditions. Since the doctors could not predict how many patients they could treat per day, ill Ecuadorians arrived every morning to wait outside the hospital in the heat. Since eating or drinking disqualifies a patient from receiving surgery, those patients hopeful for surgery abstained from food and water for days.

The volunteer doctors were unable to treat every patient, but even those turned away at the day's end were effusive in their praise for the volunteers. "One Ecuadorian woman stopped me on the stairs," Dr. Johnson said, "Through an interpreter, she said, 'I want you to know how much this means to us; we can not show you enough admiration.' She said this even after her husband had been waiting in line for care for four days and knowing that we had no power to choose who would be next. Fortunately, he became our next to last patient."

“Amigos de Salud” has made annual pilgrimages to places such as Peru, Nicaragua and Costa Rica since 1989. This past trip was Dr. Johnson’s second medical mission, and he now plans to attend every year, eventually bringing all of his four children. This year, son Keaton accompanied his father, photographing the mission and assisting wherever possible, cleaning instruments after procedures, gathering rags and delivering medications to doctors in recovery rooms.

“The best thing about this trip was sharing it with my son,” said Dr. Johnson, “Seeing how other people live in less fortunate conditions not only makes us appreciate what we have, but motivates us to give back, however we can. In my case, I feel that my training and education as a doctor puts me in a privileged position to help people in need of medical care.”

While Dr. Johnson admitted that taking an entire week off from his busy vein clinics in Cody, Wyoming, and Billings, Montana was “a huge undertaking,” he quickly points out the trip was well worth the sacrifices.

“I do it because I want to be a contributing part of the world community,” said Dr. Johnson.



About Rocky Mountain Vein Clinic:

Dr. Bo Johnson M.D. is the Medical Director of Rocky Mountain Vein Clinic, based in Cody, Wyoming and Billings, Montana. The Rocky Mountain Vein Clinic specializes in treating varicose veins and vein diseases using Endovenous Laser Therapy and RF- Radiofrequency (VNUS) Closure®.