Focusing on the Ixcán

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INTRODUCING...TWO PATIENTS
BY SCOTT IKE

One of the things that keeps me motivated to continue my work in Guatemala is having the opportunity to visit with our patients who have had their vision restored with cataract surgery. These are surgeries funded by you, our gracious supporters. In Ixcán last month, one day was packed with patients for me to see, but when 2 previous surgery patients showed up to offer their thanks, I took a few minutes to meet with them.

I’ll introduce you first to Andres, a 57 year old man from the village of Los Angeles. Andres suffers from diabetes and bad knees from a life of hard manual labor. He has a wife and 8 children, so working on his “parcela” (farmland) to grow crops, like corn and beans, to feed his family is a 7 day a week job. All the labor is done by hand, back and legs. In a good crop year they have extra to sell to pay for other necessities.

With Andres was Cornelio, a 76 year old man, who looks much younger. The two men had met when they went to have their surgeries together on Enfoque Ixcán’s October trip to the eye clinic. Cornelio has lived in Ixcán since age 6, which means he’s lived through a lot, including the military violence in Ixcán in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Cornelio and his wife live in Nueva Jerusalem where they have raised 8 children. He couldn’t tell me how many grandchildren he has. “Mucho, mucho,” was all he said with a little chuckle.

Before the cataract surgery on his right eye, walking was dangerous for him and he could no longer distinguish letters, reading was out of the question. He spent most of his life as a carpenter, working with his hands, another thing he could no longer do.

Felipe, our lead eye health promoter, has an interest in taking a “refractionist” class offered by Visualiza. We’ll look into this after we gather more information about the class requirements.

Felipe noted that his motorcycle is getting old (6 years) and maintenance is becoming more costly with more and bigger repairs needed. We will start budgeting for a new one.

Make arrangements for next August’s trip with Amigos. We visited with the restaurant owner to schedule our meals, the Catholic nuns to reserve our rooms and Apolonio, the Ixcán school supervisor, to line up our school visits. We will be traveling west to the villages of Xalbal and Valle Uno in addition to 2 days of clinics in Playa Grande.

Examine patients needing eye care. I saw around 30 patients in 2 days, mostly people needing cataract surgeries, some needing glasses and one school teacher with unexplained vision loss.

Post trip update—Felipe took 24 patients to the eye surgery clinic in San Benito the week after we left. The patients included our oldest cataract patient to date, age 93, our eye health promoter, Pedro, to have a cataract surgery and our youngest surgery patient to date, age 7 (she will have surgery to open her tear duct in April). The patient examined with unexplained vision loss was sent to San Benito for a more thorough examination. She was found to have a brain tumor and will be having brain surgery the first week in March in Guatemala City. Our prayers are with her.

Thus went another trip to Ixcán. The eye health promoters, our patients and everyone at Enfoque Ixcán would like to thank all of you for supporting our work. Without your donations this valuable work would not happen.
**February Trip Check List**

*By Scott Pike*

I want to Guatemala in February armed with my list of things to accomplish, fully realizing that it never goes quite as well as planned. Here’s how this trip turned out for my check list.

Guatemala City:

- Meet with our attorney, Santiago, and deliver final paperwork for becoming a Guatemalan non-profit. We completed all the paperwork which will be submitted to the government by the end of February, then wait. (Estimate of 2-6 months.)
- Visit the eye clinic, Visualiza. We met with clinic director, Douglas, paid our surgical bill from October, discussed training for our eye health promoters and reviewed plans for our new clinic building.
- Pick up letterhead and envelopes being printed at CEGMOSA, our printer.
- Meet with optical lab owner, Dario. Cancelled.
- Discuss with Guatemalan optometrist friend, Rolando, the possibility of his doing some work for us in Ixcán. We will write up a plan for him to consider.
- Attend the meeting of the Guatemala Oeste Rotary Club. We touched base with old friends, met the president-elect and discussed the club’s ability to help with the August Enfoque Ixcán/Amigos Eye Care in-country trip expenses. The result was very positive.

Coban:

- On our way to Ixcán, stop to meet with the president of the Coban Rotary Club regarding their willingness to become a host club for a Rotary grant sponsored by Forest Grove Daybreak Rotary Club, in Oregon. We were able to meet with Nolo, the president and Alvaro, the treasurer. They are interested, but need to check with the membership and make sure they are eligible. The grant would help equip our new clinic.

Ixcán:

- Meet with the Director of the Public Health office, Nery. Nery wrote up a preliminary agreement regarding our use of land near the new hospital for our clinic headquarters. The hospital is 30% to 40% completed and is expected to be finished by December of this year. We visited the hospital site to see the progress and identify the location best suited for our clinic. The hospital construction is limping along, by our standards. Most of the work is done by hand, shovels are used to do most of the digging and lumber and cinder blocks are lifted by hand. This makes for a slower process than we’re used to. He assured us that our clinic will be connected to the electrical, sewer and water utilities used by the hospital. Nery invited us to offer another eye care workshop for the Ixcán nurses when we return in August, similar to what we did last August.
- Meet with the Enfoque Ixcán eye health promoters. We spent a day with the eye health promoters delivering more inventory, discussing procedures and workloads. The eye health promoters are dedicated workers and do a great job for eye care in Ixcán.

Armuli, who lives on the west side of the region, in Mayaland, is no longer working at our main office in Playa Grande. He sees eye patients in his own village and helps Felipe with surgical follow-up visits when the patients are from his area. Armuli is he has been elected the Mayor of Mayaland for 2015. Congratulations!

Pedro, my cofounder of Enfoque Ixcán, is no longer working for the government health post in his village of Santa María Tzaja. He now has more time to work with eye care. We will make every effort to include him in the day to day work of Enfoque Ixcán. Initially, we will have him accompany and help Felipe when he takes patients to the Visualiza eye surgery clinic in San Benito, Petén.

Checklist continued on page 4

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**Two Patients Continued**

Continued from page 1

He can read again, enjoys playing with his grandchildren and can now moves about on his own. He feels like he has more freedom now. The blured vision in his other eye bothers him, but he plans to have that surgery completed later this year on another Enfoque Ixcán trip.

I don’t think I’ve ever been thanked so many times as I was from Cornelio. Enfoque Ixcán is everyone of you, our supporters, and his message to all of us was, "Thanks be to God for people like you who help the poor, like us."
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Fifty-seven is an early age to get cataracts, but a hard life in the sun and other factors left him functionally blind for about a year. He had to be led around with help from his family and a cane to steady himself on the dirt paths in his hilly community.

His first eye surgery, funded by your donations, was last October. He feels like a “new man.” He’s now able to get about on his own, and without the cane! “Gracias a Dios,” he told me, “I can now recognize my friends faces before I hear their voices!” He had his second cataract surgery the last week in February (2015) when eye health promoter Felipe took another group of 28 people to the eye surgery clinic. With a better outlook on life, here’s hoping for many years of good vision for Andres.

Next was another trip to Ixcán. The eye health promoters, our patients and everyone at Enfoque Ixcán would like to thank all of you for supporting our work. Without your donations this valuable work would not happen.