

Reflections on the Medical Expedition

by Rhonda Grigg, Pediatrician

It was a trip full of unknowns. We had planned to conduct a surgical clinic in Peru. After having problems getting supplies through customs, we regrouped and headed to Ecuador to provide medical care among the poor in outlying areas and in the city.



The ground rules were simple: (1) Be flexible. (2) Everything's perfect. We went with open minds and had an experience that totally exceeded anything we had anticipated. Our host ensured that all of our physical needs were met and showed us many cultural sites, cultural programs, historic ruins and beautiful gardens.

We attended to 550 patients during five days of medical clinics. A few patients really stood out: One three-year-old came in smiling and running around. If you didn't know any better you'd think he was perfectly healthy. Inside his chest, however, beats a defective heart. A hole between two parts of his heart diverts large amounts of blood and floods his lungs. Within a few years, if untreated, the pressure in his lungs will build up until no blood goes to his lungs and he will not be able to get oxygen to his body. His family did not have the \$4000 for surgery.



Another case that stood out was a six-year-old boy who also looked normal until he lifted his shirt. His sternum (breastbone) was deformed so badly that it practically touched his backbone. He's grown well so far but that will change soon. There's just no room in his chest for his heart and lungs to grow with the deformed bone there.

Both boys would die if left untreated. The national Rotarians enrolled both boys in a Rotary funded program for kids who may need heart or chest surgery.

These kinds of trips are long and exhausting. We work hard and give a lot of ourselves. Many people's lives are touched in the process, but none so much as ours. There's just something about working together in difficult circumstances and then resting and relaxing together that makes a close bond between friends. I'm looking forward to my next trip.