



UNIDAD HOSPITALARIA MOVIL LATINO AMERICA (UHMLA)

WINTER 2022

UHMLA DURING THE PANDEMIC HIATUS



At the turning of 2019 to 2020 UHMLA was already packed and ready to go to Guatemala while a second team was preparing for Perú in March. The Guatemala team left on January 3rd and returned on the 10th. In this trip UHMLA was returning to Antigua to work at the Surgery Center of the Obras Sociales del Hermano Santo Pedro.

With the assistance of Partners for Surgery patients were recruited from rural areas and transported to Antigua. The team was led by Billy Diehl and included the Iamatteos, the Kucheras, Rachel Thompson, Gina Cavallo, Rebecca Martinez, Kristi Pesci, Josh Mattlin, Barbara Duff and the Ayhans, Mel and Ekrem. Gynecological and General surgeries were performed using both laparoscopy and open approaches. The goals of the trip were reached without any major problems.

As we were preparing for the Perú trip the WHO declared COVID 19 a global pandemic. With much regret, the trip to Perú was called off with airline tickets having already been purchased. We went through the first surge of COVID in New Jersey during March, April and May and had very little time to think about UHMLA during that time. Knowing that we wouldn't be able to travel for the rest of the year we decided to ship equipment and supplies to Honduras. In early July we shipped a 20-foot container filled with 2 operating room tables, one anesthesia machine, one autoclave, harmonic scalpels, one laparoscopic tower fully equipped including instruments, camera, and laparoscopes. We also added maternal fetal monitors, wheel chairs, oxygen generators and several other medical supplies.

The equipment is already installed in the Hospital Enrique Aguilar Cerrato, in LA Esperanza, Honduras. **Franz Bach**, President and CEO of KOBA, along with Dr. **Susan Kaye** from the Benjamin Josephson Fund and Shoulder to Shoulder were all instrumental in making this shipment possible.

Along with the trips, we were also forced to cancel the Day at the Races and Casino Night fundraisers. During the shortened horse-racing season Perspicacious, Quiberon Bay and Wolfe'N Hawke continued to generate funds for UHMLA. **Dennis and Joan Milne**, who is also the trainer, from Sterlingbrook Equine Inc., own these three horses and have committed a percentage of their earnings to UHMLA.

We have also received a donation from A-Connect, a worldwide consulting company with offices in Princeton where one of our loyal friends, **Hillary Rush**, works as a consultant. Other sustaining donors continued their contributions to UHMLA: **Kerri Mulins**, **Mary Ann Faveta** and **Ariane Dewey**.

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YANTALÓ 2022

We reconnected with Mery Padilla in Perú and planned the typical week of screening patients and performing surgeries. The team was aimed to perform both General and Gynecological Surgery. General Surgery was offered by Rolando Rolandelli and Nina Fallon with Amanda Nemezc and Alex Rowan. Gynecological Surgery was offered by Michael Kuchera and Michael Ingber with Miriam Campeas. The anesthesia team was led by Rebecca Martinez with Christina Brown, Carolina Gomez and Kali Schwindt. The nursing team was led by Mel Ayhan and included Maureen McGrath, Yudi Cortez, Conny Beam, Carl Brown, Yuri Jaramillo, Kathleen Kuchera and Rachel Thompson. Support members included Mercedes Rolandelli (interpreter), Suki Dewey (instrument processing), Ashley and Remy McEnroe (schedule).

On Sunday patients were screened and a schedule of surgeries planned for Monday through Friday. The team did a total of 73 surgeries during the week and was ready to return home the following Saturday when a terrible accident occurred at the Lima airport. During takeoff an airplane crashed into a firetruck on the runway. As a result, the Lima airport closed with no incoming or outgoing flights for 36 hours. The team retreated in Tarapoto awaiting alternative flight arrangements with the help of Stefanie Coakes. Through various routes and airlines, all team members arrived home by Thanksgiving Day.





Patients awaiting interviews on 11/13/2022



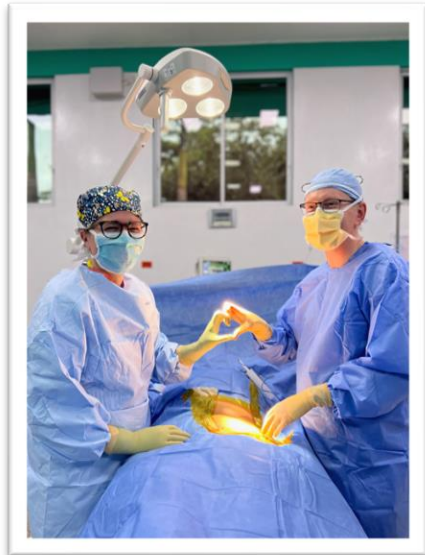
The group divided into three teams at work



One of the teams during "turnover time"



The "Post-Anesthesia" team



A FOLLOW UP ON THE CASE OF ROBINSON

Everything was going according to plan until the afternoon of Wednesday June 27, 2018. Mery Padilla, the coordinator of the hospital, made a special request: she wanted us to evaluate a patient who was a dear friend of hers and a very active member of the community of Yantalo, in fact he was running for Mayor of the town. Robinson Vazquez Riva. Robi was born in 1983 and had received a degree in systems engineering in Lima. When we met him he was 35 years old and had a family history of colon cancer, his mother and brother already had surgery. He had developed gastrointestinal symptoms which lead to multiple studies that revealed a colon cancer in the splenic flexure. He was also quite anemic. We were told that he was on a waiting list to have surgery in Lima at an uncertain future date. They wanted us to do the surgery right then and there. Undertaking such a complex surgery on an UHMLA mission was totally unprecedented for us. We convened a team meeting then we met with the family. During that meeting we insisted that this was not what we were prepared for on missions. The family insisted that even without our usual resources and preparation we were the best possible hope for Robi. After a very intense conversation we decided to go ahead with the surgery the next day.

We were carrying the necessary laparoscopic supplies to perform cholecystectomies but not colon surgery. Based on the studies we reviewed we planned on mobilizing the colon laparoscopically, bring it out through a small incision, remove the diseased area and reconnect it. When we began mobilizing the colon we realized that the tumor was firmly

attached to the stomach. In order to be sure that the cancer was eradicated from the body he would need that part of the stomach removed along with the colon. Up to that point, we had not taken any irreversible steps, so we stopped the surgery and had another meeting with the family. If the day before we had been reluctant to remove a section of the colon, now knowing that the surgery Robi needed had doubled in complexity we strongly advised the family to plan on taking him to Lima. Once again, they insisted that they had more trust in us proceeding with the surgery than waiting for his turn in Lima.

We went ahead and opened the abdomen, removed half of the colon and about one third of the stomach. We then reconnected the intestine and closed the defect on the stomach. The surgery was as uneventful as one can hope a surgery can go even at our home hospital. We set up a room for his recovery and a series of nurses' shifts. The next day Robi greeted us with a smile and thanked us profusely. By Saturday morning his bowels started to function again and before we left, he was free of IV fluids, on just Tylenol and eating a soft diet. Two days later, he went home. In spite of the attachment of the tumor to the stomach the pathological examination had very favorable results.

We stayed in touch via telephone and social media and saw him again in 2019. At that time his mother had colon surgery by us and also did well. Since then, Robi's brother succumbed to colon cancer in spite of having surgery in Lima.

Robi is now the local director of the Dirección Regional de Transportes y Comunicaciones de San Martín.



Discussions with Robi, his family, and Mery on June 26th, 2018



Left: The initial surgery on June 28th, 2018



Right: on the second Postoperative day



Robi, who is now free of disease in recent studies, visited the UHMLA Team on November 14th, 2022

THE MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Those joining the field of surgery very quickly realize that carrying out surgical procedures is a team effort. Every team member is essential to a safe and successful surgical outcome. However, just like in sporting events, there is always an MVP. During our most recent trip to Perú, the clear MVP was Melahat Ayhan. In her role as an OR nurse, Mel led the entire group from the early preparations for the trip to the final accounting of all the instruments upon our return.

Mel was born in Turkey and grew up working on her family's farm. She studied nursing in Turkey and met her husband there. They decided to emigrate to the US and first settled in Ohio. They raised three wonderful sons in the US. One son is currently a cadet at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, another has been accepted to medical school, and the third received his undergraduate education at Lehigh University with a major in Architecture. Since she arrived to Morristown Medical Center in 2006 Mel has excelled in the Main Operating Room and has risen to become the OR Nurse Coordinator for Robotic Surgery.

Mel joined UHMLA for the last trip pre-pandemic, Guatemala 2020, and continued volunteering her time when COVID sidelined UHMLA. Since that time, Mel has taken charge of the supplies in storage. She created an inventory system and screened all recent donations.

Organizing the first trip post-pandemic was challenging. Many team members were unsure if they were ready to leave the country and were concerned about leaving all COVID precautions. Mel was the main recruiter for volunteers to join in this mission. We began the initial preparations for Perú 2022 in two meetings, one via zoom and the other in person. It was during these meetings that we were able to plan the trip in addition to the transport of supplies.

Once we arrived in Yantaló, Mel led the team and organized our designated pre-operative and operating areas. She divided the nurses and techs into groups to work in the three operating stations. Mel rationed all the supplies necessary to support the scheduled surgeries and maintained control over all the inventory throughout the trip. Always attentive to detail, Mel obtained continuous education credits for the nurses who traveled to Perú almost immediately upon our return.

Mel not only focused on completing specific essential tasks but also ensured they were executed to the highest professional standard. Although the team was met with several challenging circumstances, Mel always led with a calm and positive attitude. Mel combined a friendly smile with a firm directive, inspiring all others to follow her lead. With her steadfast nurturing and positive attitude, Mel led a team that worked to care for patients with the highest level of patient safety and quality of care. Her exemplary leadership skills were evident not only to the UHMLA team but also the local personnel with whom Mel communicated despite the language barriers. In summary, Mel demonstrated the perfect combination of professionalism and compassion needed in any UHMLA mission. For that reason, she was unanimously chosen as the MVP of Peru 2022.



**Melahat
Ayhan, RN
Peru 2022
MVP**

THE SURGERY RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

As 4th year surgical residents, we went into the trip with confidence that our training would give us the skills necessary to be successful, however we knew that working with new teams in a new environment would present a challenge that we were excited to take on.

Although the UHMLA surgical mission trips were delayed by the COVID pandemic for the past 2 years, the spirit of service was not lost amongst the Morristown Surgical and OB/GYN residents, and we were excited to be part of the group returning to Yantaló, Peru. What a week we ended up having!

After a day of air travel and a three-hour drive, we found ourselves at the edge of the Amazon rainforest in a beautiful hospital surrounded by lush green forests complimented by colorful flowers scattered across the landscape. When we first walked into the hospital, we were greeted by over 100 people who came from near and far to have surgery.

Our Peruvian colleagues did an amazing job screening patients prior to our arrival. We saw over 50 general surgery patients, and by the end of the day 47 were booked for the OR. Each patient showed up with appropriate imaging, labs, and a working diagnosis that made the process seamless. At our resident clinic in Morristown, operative planning is relatively straightforward as there are effectively unlimited resources at our fingertips, however each case in Yantaló made us step back and consider how it can be done safely with the limited resources available. What we consider routine, like a set of labs, or follow up imaging, would put significant stress on the system and we had to consider each case in the context of our environment. Moreover, we had to consider the

possible complications of each case in assessing surgical risk because getting a unit of blood, or admitting a patient, were not as easy as a few clicks on Epic would make it seem.

The rest of the week was operating from sunup to sundown. The OR was a large rectangular room with high ceilings and 3 OR tables spaced evenly apart. The first table had a laparoscopic set up with 1 screen, the middle table was for minor procedures and cases under spinal anesthesia, and the 3rd table was set up for cases under general anesthesia. In total our general surgery team performed 10 laparoscopic cholecystectomies, 17 inguinal hernias, 3 ventral hernias, 9 umbilical hernias, 8 soft tissue mass excisions, 2 mastectomies and 2 fistulotomies.

The operative experience pushed us to think beyond our current training in Morristown and think through surgeries from start to finish. Each step of the case needed to be considered to ensure we had the right instruments and materials available. We learned that much of the expensive and complex tools like the Davinci Robot or nuclear medicine scanners, are not essential for providing safe surgery. A surgeons' most important tool is their own ingenuity and problem solving as much as it is the technical equipment. It's amazing what we can do with basic tools and understanding of surgical technique to get the job done safely and at a high standard of care. For the cases we completed, no corners were cut, and we provided the exceptional care that a patient, whether in Yantaló or Morristown, should be able to expect from our team.

One of the most important lessons this trip reinforced was how important the team mentality is in surgery. The surgeon is only part of the team, and if it was not for the support the rest of the team from anesthesia to OR nursing to the pre and postop nurses to the supply team sterilizing our limited

instruments constantly for the next procedure. Without them, the entirety of the task would have quickly fallen apart. It is a lesson that we will bring back to Morristown as it is a lesson that can easily be overlooked in the rigor and routine of the day-to-day work. Overall, this trip not only provided a great service to the community of Yantaló Peru, but it displayed just how complicated the machine to generate a successful surgery is. Along with the friends we made along the way, we hope to carry these lessons through our education and practice and hopefully to future UHMLA trips!

We want to give thanks for the group of professionals on the trip and includes the anesthesia team, a preop/PACU team, and even an instrument cleaning team. Although many of us were meeting for the first time, we were able to focus on the collective mission and worked well together from day one. Importantly, our greatest thanks is for the Yantaló medical team who laid the foundation for us to complete so many cases in a short amount of time. Their work is an inspiration to us, and we are grateful for their work and dedication to the Yantaló community.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR OUR UPCOMING
FUNDRAISING EVENT
THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 2023
7:00PM – 10:00PM
AT THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

