Global Medical Brigades

Stephan Koruba has a niece named Sahra who is a student at DePaul University in Chicago. In February she called him to share the exciting news that she was going to travel to Honduras to help support rural medical clinics. She also asked if he and his wife Anna would be willing to travel with her. With little hesitation they both agreed.

They began collecting money, medicine, office supplies, vaccines (for themselves!) and medical supplies to bring along. On June 24th they boarded a flight at O’Hare Airport in Chicago at 2am. By 1pm that same day they were in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. From there, the group of 17 students, one doctor, one nurse and one massage therapist traveled by van to an orphanage about three hours southeast of the capitol.

The first day was full of relaxing and touring the various facilities run by Global Medical Brigades. The hard work started early on the second day. The bus left at 6:30am and drove another two hours west. A makeshift clinic was set up in a three-room school: a triage center, treatment center, and pharmacy. In the next five hours 750 native Hondurans received basic medical care.

In the next two days the same team of people saw another 800 Hondurans from two different villages, bringing the total up to 1500. Most people came with their entire family. There were mothers with five to eight children who all had intestinal parasites. Old men brought their grandchildren who had skin fungus. Old women leaned on each other to walk all morning to ask for aspirin to alleviate their arthritis and headaches. There were teething babies with fevers, pregnant women who needed vitamins, men with heartburn, diabetics needing insulin, and heart patients needing blood thinners.

This was the first time in 9 months that any of them had a chance to see a doctor.

“I Am Not a Nurse”
Taking a look out the door of a schoolroom and seeing 750 people lined up in the rain for basic medical care changes your life. You see that they are dressed in their nicest clothes, mostly donated by various religious missionaries. You see their whole extended family huddled under one tattered umbrella. You see that they are hungry, sick, anxious, and very, very scared.

For me, Anna Koruba, massage therapist and Healing Touch Practitioner, the first true emotion I felt was desperation. How were we going to see all these people? There were two Spanish translators for triage, only two medical doctors and one nurse, and only one pharmacist. Overwhelming just doesn’t cover it.

“I can’t do this. I can’t do this. I can’t help these people. I am not a nurse.”

No. I am not a nurse. But I am a human being. With my basic knowledge of the Spanish language I sat at a desk and prepared myself for my first patient. I took deep breaths. I felt firmly connected to the earth below me. I found the place in the center of my chest where my fear lived, and I promised it that I would make room for it later.

When the first woman with her three young children appeared in the doorway, I saw her fear. It looked a lot like mine. I did the only thing I felt qualified to do. I smiled genuinely and waved my arms to get their attention. Immediately the mother recognized that this was a safe place, a comforting place. She smiled back as she made her way to my table.

After I finished recording her symptoms, I looked her in the eyes and thanked her for coming to the clinic. Again I saw that smile of relief. I would see that smile about 325 more times that day and 700 times over the next three days. THAT is what I did in Honduras.
About the author:
Anna Koruba is a Licensed Massage Therapist and Healing Touch Practitioner who lives and works in Eastern Montana. She was born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago, graduated with a BA in theater from Augustana College in 2001 and The New School for Massage, Bodywork and Healing with a massage license in 2006. She’s been a HT Practitioner since August, 2007. Her husband, Stephan, is an amazing ER/MedSurg Nurse, and together they have 2 cute dogs and 2 pesky cats.

Above: Anna and Stephan explain medicines to a Honduran mother.

Above: Anna (left) and Katelyn Necastro (right) translating triage notes from Spanish into English.