September 2009 Mission to El Salvador

We would like to thank all of our donors, volunteers and contributors for making our September 2009 mission a great success!

Heart Care International’s fifth major mission to El Salvador this fall was dedicated to our dear friend and long time team member, Dr. Mark Boucek who passed away last March.

HCI’s medical team was able to perform life-saving heart surgeries and catheterization procedures on 48 children who had no prior hope of access to the desperately needed life saving procedures. All of the children operated on by HCI in September have returned home and are doing very well.

We are excited to report that we continue to make progress towards achieving a sustainable, self-sufficient cardiac program in El Salvador, and Heart Care International remains committed to the training and development of a local medical team.

We truly appreciate your solid support, especially in these difficult economic times. Quite simply, we would not be able to do our work without your generous help. So again, on behalf of Heart Care International and Central America’s poorest children and their families, thank you.
The Children

The majority of the children treated by Heart Care International have very similar stories: their little hearts have been born with a type of defect that prevents them from living a normal life, and if not treated will shorten their life span.

Most cannot run or walk for too long, they get tired very quickly and often faint. Most of them are very small, thin, breathe quickly and suffer from frequent respiratory illnesses. These respiratory illnesses may hit them so hard that they must be rushed to a hospital’s intensive care unit. Some of them have bluish skin, lips and fingernails due to the lack of oxygen in their little bodies.

They all have desperate, economically challenged parents who cannot afford to pay for the needed treatment. The only public hospital in their home country that can help them works routinely over its capacity. While more than several hundred children present to the doctors each year with pediatric heart disease, the available hospital is only able to perform 20 surgeries a year and only the most basic types of procedures. HCI is committed to teaching the local team to perform more complex life saving procedures.

We are grateful that all the children treated during the September mission have recovered beautifully. Those children who were blue are now pink, those that could not run can now play with their siblings, and those whose futures were once in jeopardy now have a new lease on life.

In the following pages we will introduce to you some of the children you helped us save as well as some of the staff involved in our project.

Cesar, 8 years
Beatriz, 14 years
Hector, 11 years
Fatima, 4 years
Aracely, 8 years
Carolina, 10 years
Children’s Reunion Party
Every year, the children that were treated by HCI return for a wonderful party. We love to see how much they’ve grown and changed over the years!
The Heart Care International Team
This year the Heart Care International team consisted of 80 wonderful medical volunteers.

Every year our team members take unpaid vacation time to join our missions. They work extremely hard in order to provide the El Salvadoran children with the very best quality healthcare. These medical volunteers perform surgery, catheterization, unpack supplies, set up operating rooms, sweep floors and make certain that all of the equipment is working properly… in short they do everything that is needed to make a successful mission.

They are extraordinary people and we thank them for their commitment, generosity and courageous will to help the children in need.

Surgeons:
Robert E Michler, M.D. Montefiore Medical Center, New York, NY
Sam Weinstein, M.D. Montefiore Medical Center, New York, NY
Allistair Phillips, M.D. Ohio Children’s Hospital. Columbus, OH
Guillermo Martinez, Bloom Children’s Hospital, San Salvador
Guillermo Rodriguez, Bloom Children’s Hospital, San Salvador

Team captains:
Surgery: Sam Weinstein MD
Anesthesia: Bill Schechter, M.D.
ICU nursing: Betsy Tirado and Carolyn Kyne
ICU doctors: Tessie October, M.D.
OR nursing: Brett Emmerson and Roberta Rodeman
Perfusion: Daniel Gomez and Jim Reagor
Respiratory: Nilsa Negron
Screening and Cardiology: Joe Gaffney, M.D.
Cath Lab: Ernie Siwik, M.D. and Anna Bernus, M.D.
Screening Team
A few days before the surgical and ICU teams travel to El Salvador, the Heart Care International screening team reviews ECHO’s on more than 100 children.

The Operating Rooms
The Heart Care International surgeons and their teams work long hours to heal as many little hearts as possible. Three operating room teams work simultaneously. One of those rooms is staffed by a team that includes the El Salvadorian surgeons and nurses.
Special Events

Visit from the First Lady of El Salvador
Mrs. Vanda Guiomar, the new First Lady of El Salvador visited the children operated by the Heart Care International team at the Bloom Hospital. She also met several of the HCI team members and board members, as well as those of our local partner, Sana mi Corazon.

Memorial Dinner for Dr. Mark Boucek
Heart Care International hosted a dinner in memory of our very dear friend and team member, cardiologist Mark Boucek. Mark was an amazing human being who for many years worked tirelessly to save the lives of hundreds of children. He joined Heart Care International in 1995 as the cath lab team leader. The Heart Care International team will always remember his energy, generosity and sense of humor.

On behalf of all the El Salvadorian children and their families, we thank you.