

Featured Hospital

Memorial Medical Center, Springfield

By Sharon Iben

ER Abroad: Mission Possible



What started as a patient-nurse relationship blossomed into an Emergency Department's mission to provide healthcare to an orphanage in Guatemala. In February 2008, eleven staff members of Memorial Medical Center in Springfield, Illinois did make that mission possible.

Peggy Knowski, RN, met Melissa and Jeremy Keltner, missionaries for the orphanage Casa Angelina in the small village of Chimaltenanago, when Melissa was a patient in the ED. She learned a medical clinic and housing was being built for the lost and forgotten children of Guatemala. Due to organization by Peggy Knowski, the desire to help arose and for Christmas 2006 an angel tree for 30 orphans developed. Soon after began the planning for a group of medical personnel to head there with more than just Christmas presents. Donations and fundraisers made it possible to pay for the group's trip and donate \$2000 to the medical clinic.

On February 17, 2008, the team of Peggy Knowski, RN, Rachel Sedlacek, RN, Annie Kennedy, RN, Angie Rodriguez, RN, Leigh Ann Abbott, RN with her son Nolan, (age 7), Kate Phillips, RN, Dennis Danner, RN, Chrissy Knepler, RN, her husband Monty (from Memorial Homecare), Randy Burge, EMT, Carmen Wittmer, EMT, and Bo Schneider, MD, all employees of Memorial's Emergency Department, left for their destination. They brought along eleven suitcases with almost 500 pounds of medical supplies, medicines, soap, lotion and school

supplies. The team staffed the clinic for five days and saw almost 400 orphans and people from surrounding villages. Ailments ranged from skin infections to machete wounds. Through an interpreter, basic first aid and CPR were taught to the orphanage staff members.

The emotions felt by the ER Abroad team members ranged from being extremely frustrated, due to the villagers having no access or money for basic medical care, to a thoroughly enriching experience, since the smallest things were so greatly appreciated by the patients. Knowski relates, “We were giving out toothbrushes and toothpaste and you would have thought we were handing them gold bars. I think that is what we all got back the most. It reminded us why we went into healthcare in the first place. We are put on this planet to help each other and it was very, very rewarding to do that.”

The strong bond formed between the ER Abroad team and the people in Guatemala continues on with the planning of another trip to Casa Angelina next year. The hopes and dreams of this group would be for missions to continue to provide healthcare to these orphans and villagers for many years to come. If anyone is interested in learning more about this orphanage, please visit www.ivantaitmissions.com .