



RCA Global Mission

2020 Year in Review



Ahuas Clinic – Honduras

In 2020, the Ahuas Clinic continued its ongoing curative and preventive medical programs for the residents of Eastern Honduras. From January to December, 3,458 outpatients were seen, 235 babies were born, 940 persons were hospitalized, 309 surgeries were performed, 3,810 lab tests were done, with 433 ultrasounds and 481 x-rays taken. The Infant Feeding Program, with three sites located in Ahuas, Krupunta, and Barra Patuca, continued to feed approximately 100 children daily. In addition to this effort to address the problem of infant malnutrition, the Preventive Health arm of the hospital held weekly pre-natal, healthy baby, tuberculosis, and other clinics. Training of midwives took place in outlying villages, visits to area schools were made and day-long outpatient clinics were held in several villages.

The hospital in Ahuas continues to meet the medical needs of the surrounding population. Under the watchful eye of Hospital Director Ted Riven, things are functioning well. We note an improvement in hospital administration since Ted started about two years ago. Dr. Kenneth Serapio, the only general surgeon in the entire region, continues to receive patients who come on their own or are referred by other medical practitioners. Dr. Saraí Suazo sees outpatients and, with Kenneth, has gained the confidence of the local population as together they attend to both outpatients and those requiring in-hospital stays.

Blessings of 2020

- To become more self-sufficient, the clinic opened a *glorieta* (small store) two years ago. That store showed a profit in 2020. Building on that modest success, a *bodega* (wholesale warehouse) was established in 2020 to sell bulk food (e.g., rice, beans, flour, sugar) to both employees and the community in general.
- The John Deere tractor (purchased in 2019) provides yet another revenue stream as residents pay to transport merchandise, lumber, sand, gravel, and other materials.
- The Christ Memorial Congregation from Holland, Michigan, sent a work crew to Honduras early in 2020. That group helped with needed maintenance and repair both at the hospital and also in the pilot's house. At their suggestion, the Ahuas Clinic applied for help through the congregation's Thanksgiving Offering. A generous grant was approved to build new visitors' quarters, construct an additional inpatient house, and replace roofs on the OR, administrator's, and pilot's homes.



First stages of construction of new visitors' quarters made possible with Christ Memorial's Thanksgiving offering

- Eight work crews from RCA congregations, Moravian churches, and other groups visited the hospital in the first three months of the year before COVID-19 put an end to international travel. In addition to much-needed maintenance and repair work at the facility in Ahuas, medical crews visited outlying villages and helped with the Infant Feeding Program sites in both Ahuas and Krupunta.
- Helpful relationships with other Christian and humanitarian organizations have assisted with hurricane disaster relief. Those new partnerships, along with the ongoing generosity from RCA and Moravian sources, give us hope for continued ministry cooperation even after the disaster relief efforts have ended.
- A generous grant that will help cover the costs of an expansion of the solar electrical system was received in mid-year. In consultation with an electrical technician, hospital personnel hopes to have plans for the expansion completed by the end of February of 2021.
- The chaplain's daily visits with both inpatients and those who come for outpatient exams continue to bring people to Christ and to assist patients with spiritual help at particularly difficult times in their lives.

Dr. Saraí's Story

Dr. Saraí arrived in Ahuas in December 2019 and immediately gained the confidence of staff and patients alike with her bedside manner, friendly personality, and medical knowledge. In a recent conversation, Dr. Saraí said that in Ahuas she feels like she is in her hometown.

Dr. Saraí shares the medical work with longtime surgeon and mainstay, Dr. Keneth Serapio. While Dr. Kenneth helps every day with outpatient exams, he is routinely occupied in the OR almost every day. Between the two physicians, 15 to 30 outpatients are seen almost every day at the Moravian hospital.

On a typical day in early October, fifteen patients were being cared for at the hospital—post-surgical cases, women who had just given birth or who were waiting to give birth, patients with fractures, and others. Here are two of those stories:

1. A 35-year-old woman from Brus Laguna was riding with her husband and a son on their motorcycle when a young girl darted out in front of them. (I have seen families of up to four people riding on one motorcycle in Honduras.) To avoid hitting the pedestrian, the husband veered off the roadway. In the resulting accident, the husband, son, and the pedestrian were not injured. Unfortunately, the wife/mother suffered a broken tibia. Traveling several hours upriver, she came to the hospital in Ahuas, referred by the government health center in Brus Laguna. Dr. Kenneth successfully reduced the open fracture in the OR, but his patient developed an infection. With antibiotics and other measures, she is improving. Dr. Kenneth hopes to put a cast on the leg soon, once the infection is controlled.
2. A 59-year-old man arrived from Kuswa Apaika after experiencing a high fever for two weeks. Following his river voyage from home, he presented with a high fever and elevated blood pressure. The medical staff diagnosed him as having pneumonia. Paralysis on the left side of his body suggested that he had suffered a stroke before arriving at the hospital. With antibiotics, the medical staff has controlled his pneumonia and Dr. Saraí was hopeful that the patient would overcome the paralysis.

As the Honduran hospital in Ahuas prepares to celebrate its 75th anniversary, Dr. Saraí Suazo Mejía carries on a tradition of Christian medical ministry that represents the only advanced medical care available along the Patuca River and in the western portion of La Mosquitia. Her loving care for a predominantly indigenous population that still usually lives off of the land and lacks economic resources, is invaluable. Dr. Saraí's work with Dr.

Kenneth and the rest of the hospital staff is only possible with the ongoing financial support that has kept the Clínica Evangélica Morava functioning for more than seven decades.

Challenges of 2020

Last year was a challenging one. A recurring theme for many years continued to vex the hospital in 2020: How to keep a needed medical work operating in a remote area of the world where patients—many of whom live outside of the cash economy—are unable to pay for the medical services provided. Attempts to promote self-sustainability are frustrated by the reality of a complex and (by local standards) highly technical medical facility that includes lab, x-ray, ultrasound, pharmacy, 20 inpatient beds, labor and delivery complex, operating room, and a hybrid electrical system (consisting of both diesel generators and solar panels). The hospital faces reduced international financial subsidies while serving a population that is unable to pay for needed medical services.

The COVID-19 pandemic assaulted the area relatively late compared to the rest of the country, with the first cases and deaths being reported only in July. Anticipating a medical disaster in this area where social distancing is difficult and personal protective equipment is hard to come by, the initial death toll was thought to be the beginning of a major calamity. Significant donations covered the cost of additional PPE, oxygen concentrators, hand sanitizer, etc. For reasons that no one has been able to accurately explain, however, by October, deaths due to COVID-19 had virtually come to an end and cases dwindled to almost nothing.

In November, winds, rain, and flooding caused by hurricanes Eta and Iota battered the region. Wind damage was confined to only minor roof problems on one of the smaller hospital buildings. While flooding did not affect the hospital complex (which is situated on relatively high ground), the region’s agricultural production was almost destroyed by up to three feet of rain. In an area where a majority of the population still lives off of the rice, bean, plantain, yucca, and other crops that are grown on family plots, the floods were particularly devastating. The contamination of wells from flooding and excessive rainwater combined with the loss of food supplies has increased both hunger and illness in the region.



Damage caused by hurricane-spawned tornado in Brus Laguna



Rice seeds purchased with donations from North American supporters for flood/hurricane victims



Evacuee in Paptalaya waiting for food supplied by Moravian Board of World Mission

The hybrid electrical system was afflicted in 2020 by two major catastrophes. First, one of two inverters failed. The fact that a replacement had to be imported during the travel restrictions occasioned by COVID-19 led to long delays in making the necessary repairs. With a weakened solar electric system, the diesel generators also failed. When hospital staff was unable to solve the problems, the efforts of an outside mechanic resulted in further issues, which in turn ruined both an OR suction unit and the x-ray machine.

Learnings from 2020

- God is in control—even in times of funding cuts, mechanical disasters, hurricanes, and pandemics. We had neither the ability to predict these assaults on our ministry nor the wherewithal to address them.

Nevertheless, the Lord provided by sending a capable electrician from San Pedro, generous financial support for hurricane relief and a difficult understanding drop off in COVID-19 cases.

- International work crews are invaluable in the work that they do while in Ahuas. Of equal importance are the relationships developed between work crew volunteers and local staff, patients, and friends. International volunteers frequently speak of having their “eyes opened” or having a “life-changing experience.” Thus, while the hospital in Ahuas depends on the international visitors for many things, the spiritual impact on those same short-term missionaries is in many ways a “reverse mission.” The mutual prayer support created as a result of these visits sees international prayer support by Hondurans for North Americans and North Americans for their new Honduran acquaintances.

Hopes for 2021

In the coming year, with the help of generous donations from the Christ Memorial congregation, we hope to make much-needed improvements to the hospital’s infrastructure. A new visitors’ quarters will replace the deteriorated lodgings that were originally built above the operating room in the late 1980s. Once the new visitors’ quarters are completed above the lab, it will be possible to remove the deteriorated roof and second story from the OR. This will permit the construction of a flat concrete roof that will be weatherproof. The OR will be cleaned and painted following the installation of the new roof. A new inpatient building will be constructed to replace a dilapidated wooden building that currently requires constant maintenance. New roofs will be installed to replace asbestos on the pilot’s house and corrugated tin on the administrator’s residence.

We look forward to the June 16th anniversary of the hospital’s founding to commemorate 75 years of faithful Christian medical service to a marginalized population in a remote part of Central America. In conjunction with the 75th-anniversary celebration, we hope to raise \$75,000 that will help guarantee the long-term sustainability of the hospital.

As both Doctor Kenneth Serapio and Doctor Saraí Suazo contemplate their departure from Ahuas, we hope that efforts to recruit replacement surgeons and physicians will be successful.

How We Can Pray

Please pray for the following:

- Electrical system repairs/expansion and successful completion of planned infrastructure improvements
- Replacements for the doctors
- Hospital staff as they care for the suffering and needy patients and Doctors Kenneth and Saraí who work long hours with limited resources
- Patients who come to the Clínica Evangélica Morava with nowhere else to turn
- North Americans whose prayerful support is essential to the continued ministry
- Ongoing ministry of the Infant Feeding Program
- Permanent relief from COVID-19
- Support for the hurricane and flood victims as they rebuild homes and replant crops
- Support for attempts to renew the flight ministry of Alas de Socorro with possible help from North American and Central American Christian aviation organizations
- The possibility of a new partnership at the hospital with the United Indian Mission
- The return of work crews once the pandemic subsides
- Equipment needs, including x-ray and suction machines, repairs to the ultrasound, and ongoing maintenance requirements for the diesel generators and solar electrical system
- Successful completion of the several work projects supported by the Christ Memorial donation

Additional Needs

We hope we can resume the ambitious program of international work crews to assist in several areas:

- 1) Construction, maintenance, and repair for hospital facilities and equipment
- 2) Dentistry, both in Ahuas and in outlying communities
- 3) Curative, preventive, and surgical medical services, both in Ahuas and in outlying communities.

Financial support is an ongoing need at the hospital. Assistance is always needed for normal operating expenses where salaries, medicines, and diesel fuel continue to be the largest budget line items. Financial contributions also help cover the costs of such things as a new x-ray unit, a new suction machine, additional oxygen concentrators and tanks, a new lab machine, Spanish and/or Mískito language Bibles for the work carried on by the chaplain with patients, new chairs for the devotional room, etc.

Thank You

Prayers from both Christ Memorial and the New Era congregations have been a source of much strength and encouragement to the staff and patients of the hospital in Ahuas. We were also blessed with the work crew from Christ Memorial Congregation from Holland, Michigan, and received financial support from a New Era, Michigan, congregation, even when they were unable to send a work crew as they had in previous years.

Generous contributions from RCA congregations and individuals support the denomination's annual subsidy which in turn covers a major portion of the salaries of our two physicians. The hospital would be incapable of providing the current level of medical care without doctors Kenneth and Saraí.

Serving together,
Rick Nelson