

2009 January 31

And now for a mini-project at Malaybalay.. The rest of the team has left for North America by now after a wrap-up time in Manila, but I stayed down here in Mindanao to work for a few more days here in the hospital from which many of the Filipino volunteers come. Bethel Baptist Hospital is a much more developed site than any of the places we have been so far. We used to come here every year, but haven't for the last three years because it got to the place where other sites had greater needs. Well mainly be serving indigent patients during the next few days.

Last week was spent down in Tboli, where I dealt with an unending stream of goiters while Chantelle handled the cleft lip and palate table with a more modest number of goiters added in just so she didn't forget about them. We had an interesting Monday shake-down day plagued by power outages. Apparently something essential must be done to the power grid on Mondays these days, and whatever it was went on until midnight. After a period of finger-on-the-pulse monitoring plus our battery-operated saturation monitors a generator was provided by a nearby church and we carried on with cases until about 5:00 pm, at which point the generator belt was smoking hot and we decided to close down and do the rest of the days list by starting at 6:00 am the next day. It was just too chancy to try to power the ORs and the hospital wards after it got dark. Turned out the early start became preferred to the alternative of working late at night, since the local rooster made it impossible to sleep later anyway. Might as well be getting the work done rather than lie in bed visualizing alternative plans for the demise of said rooster

It has been interesting this year to see substantial infrastructure developments at several of the sites the teams have been going to for several years. In both Leyte and Tboli part of the team was billeted in new wings of patient rooms. These rooms even had toilets and showers in them!! No hot water, mind you, but at least you didn't have to stand guard at the door of the bathroom any more to get your turn at the tap. It's rewarding to see these sites increase the amount of care they can provide. What care the hospitals provide seems limited primarily by the poverty of many potential patients. Phil Health covers only 20 to 30% of costs for medicines, hospital costs, and physician fees. Besides that, many small farmers and shopkeepers, and people living off the ever-present little roadside stands aren't covered by Phil Health because they can't afford the premiums. Every trip I take makes me want to preserve the universal aspect of our Canadian health care system at all costs.

Our final night at Tboli was a rather emotional one for many of the team members and hospital staff. There were rich expressions of appreciation from both patients and local staff, culminating in the staff coming up to where we were up on a platform and slipping commemorative hand-beaded Tboli-style necklaces over our heads with a word of thanks and a hug. Definitely beats KGHs Be REAL program for building worker morale!

And now on to the final week here in the Philippines... And thanks for all those prayers of support I know have been happening!

Alison