

LOUISVILLE
GREATER LOUISVILLE MEDICAL SOCIETY



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Smiles of Nicaragua

A team of 19 volunteers, including 10 physicians, spent a week in Managua, Nicaragua, as part of a medical missions trip January 16-23 sponsored by the Greater Louisville Medical Society Foundation in partnership with Hand in Hand Ministries. The GLMS Foundation made it possible for two medical residents to go on the trip. These are their reflections.

Jordan Smallwood, MD



It's hard to put into words how much an experience changed you. I find it especially difficult because I feel like so many of the words have all been said before, over and over, until they become cliché. Did I receive more than I gave? Absolutely. Did I come away with a better sense of how

fortunate I am? Of course. But there was something more waiting for me in Nicaragua: a sense of family, a sense of complete and utter joy; parents proud to give their children the best education at schools that would be considered too ill-appearing to house any student here in the United States; people living in abject poverty but completely happy to live full lives with all that they have. No one demonstrated a need to rise above because no one saw themselves as poor. Their litmus test for poverty had nothing to do with finances. They understood the joy that comes with a hard day's work, no matter what that work might be.

One day we took the children to a local swimming pool and they swam for only an hour or so. But in that hour, they were happier than the children I see every day as a pediatrician. They didn't need video games to play while they waited. They played with one another, developing social skills long forgotten by today's generation of kids. They smiled bigger than I've ever seen children smile, as though I was seeing true happiness for the first time.

To come back to a hospital full of children who don't smile that way while so much has been handed to them has been difficult. But the needs of the children here are different than they were in Nicaragua. Here, I am the medical provider, the doctor, the man who hands out stickers and suckers once the shots have been administered. But there, I was gringo, I was teacher and I was a new friend. While I am so much more grateful for the life I have been given now that I am back on my comfortable couch typing this reflection, I suppose a part of my soul will always long to return to a place where happiness is not reflected in money or things or accomplishments, but rather in a sense of self-worth, hard work and being surrounded by people who care for you, even if those people are just a wayward group of Kentuckians hoping to make a difference.



Dr. David Shorten and a dental patient.

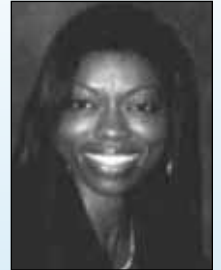


(Left to right in back) Nurse Kristy Greenwood, Dr. Andrea Krause, Dr. Emily Tan and Dr. Jordan Smallwood with children at the clinic.



Jane Unaeze, MD

This was my first medical missions trip. I am very thankful to the Greater Louisville Medical Society Foundation for making it possible for me to go on the trip. At the end, I came back home even more blessed than whatever little medical care I had provided to the people in Managua, Nicaragua.



Our team saw patients at the Dermatology Hospital in Managua where we treated different skin diseases and performed surgical excisions. Our day started at 7 a.m. and would end about 6 p.m. Each morning when we arrived at the hospital, there was always a long line of people waiting patiently to be seen by the gringo doctors. Some of the patients had waited several months for an appointment and had traveled great distances from all over the country. No one complained about anything even if they had to wait for hours to be seen. In the waiting rooms, people joked around with one another as if they were at a family reunion. They were very appreciative of the medical care they received.

When we visited some of the homes of the children who were in the Hand in Hand Ministries program, I was struck by the abject poverty in which many of the families lived. Their living circumstances would be unimaginable in America. But even in their lack of the simple pleasures of the Western world, they were happy. Children innocently played without a care in the world, adults laughed and shared jokes in their humble living quarters. Most of the homes of the families were furnished with whatever meager furniture they could afford but proudly decorated by endearing pictures of family events, graduation pictures of their children and pieces of artwork that they cherished. Their sense of pride in the little they had was quite touching. I was reminded that happiness is not based on material riches and never to take any of life's gifts for granted.

My experience on this medical mission trip is filled with many fond memories. I have been blessed not only by my interactions with the people of Nicaragua but also by the volunteers who went on the trip with me who selflessly gave of their time and talent to serve others. I intend to participate in more mission trips in the future.



Dr. Manuel Grimaldi with patients.



Dr. Jane Unaeze and Dr. Cynthia Rigby.



Dr. Nanine Henderson and a Nicaraguan boy.

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Dr. Timothy Brown (left) and Dr. Timir Banerjee.



The Nicaragua Team

Timir Banerjee, MD (neurological surgery)
Timothy Brown, MD (dermatology)
Lorrie Conway, RN
Kevin Greenwood (Louisville Metro Police)
Kristy Greenwood, RN
Manuel Grimaldi, MD (oncology)
Nanine Henderson, DO (family medicine)
Andrea Krause, MD (pediatrics)
Donald McAllister, MD (orthopaedic surgery)
Diane McAllister, RN
Maureen McAllister, NP
Courtney Nanney (medical technician)
Cynthia Rigby, MD (obstetrics and gynecology)
Judy Sapp (volunteer)
Peg Schervish (social worker)
David Shorten, DMD
Jordan Smallwood, MD (resident in pediatrics)
Emily Tan, MD (pediatrics)
Jane Unaeze, MD (fellow in dermatology)



Dr. Donald McAllister with his wife, Diane, and daughter, Maureen.

Upcoming Medical Missions Opportunities

Timothy S. Brown, MD

As the chairman of the Medical Missions/Indigent Care Committee of the GLMS Foundation, I would like to invite you to join us in upcoming mission opportunities. Our program goals are "to improve health care in needed or disadvantaged areas (local, state, national and international) through medical missions." As we broaden our efforts, we hope to encourage fellow physicians to experience the immense rewards of medical missions. Opportunities range from a few hours a month for local missions or an occasional weekend away for state missions. Also, we invite you to explore participating in our Nicaragua trip being planned for January 15-22, 2012. You will be richly rewarded by giving of your time and expertise to the underserved, and we look forward to working with you to make a profound and lasting impact through medical missions. Please call the GLMS Foundation office at (502) 736-6356 or email terry.todd@glms.org to explore mission opportunities.

