

Mission 2021 Update

Normally at this time of the year, we are finalizing our Guatemala Surgical team for the coming January mission. Flights are being booked, medications are being ordered, supplies packed and other mission details finalized as we prepare for the January departure. After many years of this routine, it feels strange not to be doing that work, but then so much of 2020 feels strange!



As we will not be travelling to Guatemala in 2021, we reached out to the Obras Sociales del Santo Hermano Pedro organization to ask how the situation in Guatemala is affecting Hermano Pedro Hospital and their employees and to learn how we can help right now.

A bit of background

On March 9, 2020, the government of Guatemala declared a State of Calamity and on March 13, 2020, the first imported case of Covid-19 was detected on Guatemalan soil. The government moved swiftly to implement restrictions to control the spread. Public transportation was cancelled outright and many people were not able to get to work, cutting off their basic income. Initially the public markets were closed and people who relied on selling everything from fruit to fabrics were suddenly out of work. The government imposed curfews that remained in place through the end of September, when the State of Calamity was ended. Public transport has reopened in Guatemala, however, there are a number of restrictions on capacity and access can still be very limited.

While people in many Central American countries are facing challenges from the pandemic, the impact may be even greater in countries like Guatemala, which are characterized by low public investment, lack of adequate health infrastructure, and large gaps in access to basic systems, including health care. The pandemic restrictions have had a disproportionate impact on the very vulnerable Mayan populations of Guatemala and poverty has increased. Within a few short weeks of Covid restrictions, the most vulnerable Guatemalans were seen on roadways with coloured flags begging for food and medicines.

The Obras Sociales organization was forced to layoff 40% of its staff. With the closing of the border to all non-essential travel, visiting medical teams cancelled their missions for the year. To maintain their most skilled staff so that there will be a surgical program when teams are again able to travel to Guatemala, the hospital has redeployed many of them to work at the Virgen del Socorro facility caring for the residential patients. With the lack of cash flow provided by visiting teams, the organization is struggling to pay their staff and purchase essential supplies.



Children signalling they need food.

In the future

We will return to Antigua, Guatemala to provide surgical services and hearing clinics to the Mayan people at greatest need. However, to be able to deliver our services, we need the experienced and skilled OR and convalescent staff in place at Hermano Pedro to support our efforts and the surgical program there.

The experience of Guatemala and the people we meet through our work in Antigua creates a lasting impression on most volunteers. Since we are not travelling to Guatemala in 2021 for our usual Antigua mission we ask you to consider donating a portion of what you would have spent to travel to Guatemala, be a volunteer there and support the economy through shopping, dining, and travel in the country. Whether you are a recent volunteer or someone who has supported our work in Guatemala in the past, we ask you to please consider making a donation to support our friends at Hermano Pedro and the sustainability of the surgical program there.

How to Donate

1. Go to the Medicos en Accion website (medicos-en-accion.com), select "Donations" from the vertical menu bar at the left and go to the bottom of the page for the Canada Helps donation form (this may take a minute or so to load).
2. Under "Fund" on the form, use the drop-down menu to select "7 Hermano Pedro Support" and;
3. Complete the rest of the form to make your donation.

A tax receipt will be e-mailed from Canada Helps within hours of your donation.



Achieving our goal!

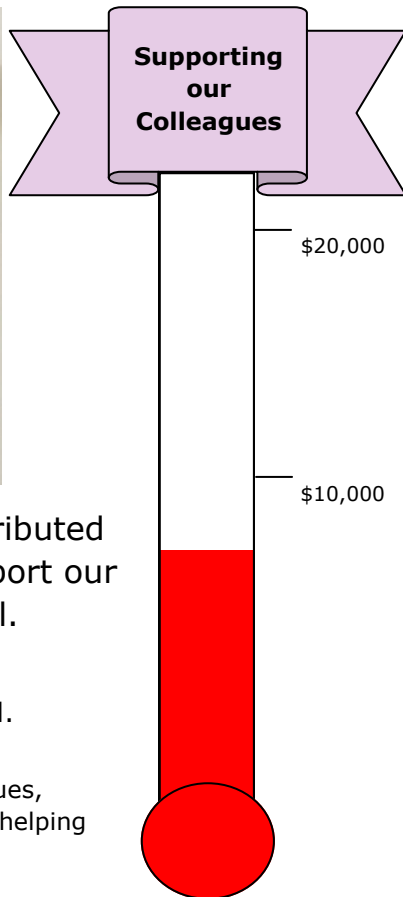


Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our goal of raising \$20,000 to support our colleagues at Hermano Pedro Hospital.

Donations are still being accepted.

Please share this newsletter with your colleagues, family and friends who might be interested in helping our hospital colleagues.

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Memories of Antigua

Photo credits: Murray McCallum, Brenda Uhryuk, Joanne Richard, David Hill-Turner.

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