

# On a medical mission to Peru



by *Steve Mora, MD*  
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“In August I returned from a seven-day medical mission to Peru, organized by the Peruvian American Medical Society. There were 28 volunteers ranging from doctors, nurses and medical students. Upon landing in Lima, we traveled 12 hours on a bus to reach the small city of Huancavelica, one of the poorest cities in Peru. Huancavelica is nestled in the Andes Mountains at 12,500 feet above sea level. Indigenous people represent the majority of the population. Although Spanish is the main language of Peru, in this city a large number of people speak the Incan language of Quechua.

“The goal of our mission was to provide medical care, including surgery, and medical surgical supplies to the local hospital. We brought much of the equipment and medicine necessary to take care of various conditions encountered in the clinic. We also equipped the hospital surgical suite with overhead operating room lamps.

“Our day began with an early breakfast at the hotel, followed by a short walk to the hospital. Some of us opted to take a morning mountain hike before breakfast to watch the sun come up over the mountains.

Once we arrived at the hospital, patients were triaged by volunteers and directed to the appropriate specialist. The doctors on the team included an obstetrician/gynecologist, cardiothoracic surgeon, orthopaedic surgeon, internal medicine specialist, pediatrician, pediatric surgeon and psychiatrist. On the second week of the mission a group of doctors from Northwestern University in Chicago joined us.

“I was able to see numerous patients, most of whom had arthritis secondary to a life of laborious lifting and climbing. I provided dozens of steroid injections for knee and shoulder arthritis. I operated on a young man with a serious infected open fracture involving his finger. I provided supplies to the local orthopaedic surgeon including plates, screws and casting supplies. I applied casts for fracture care. I taught the Peruvian medical students how to examine extremities, do a detailed neurologic exam and of course how to inject a knee. I examined many pediatric hips and was able to tell parents that

their infants did not have hip dysplasia and that they were going to be all right. Most importantly, I spoke to the patients about their medical conditions, educated them and oftentimes allayed their concerns.

“On the last day I took the 12-hour bus ride back to Lima and flew home. The experience now seems surreal and distant. Since I had lived in Peru in my infancy, going back to Peru as a healthcare provider represented something very special. I felt a closeness to the patients, brought about by my own heritage, understanding the language and having a real understanding of poverty and destitution. Some of my pictures are heartwarming, others heartbreaking. We touched a lot of lives and in turn a lot of lives touched us. I feel I left a little bit of myself in that small Peruvian town... the best parts I had to offer.

“The next medical mission to Huancavelica will be next August. If anyone is interested in participating, please email me at [myorthodoc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:myorthodoc@sbcglobal.net).”



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