

FIRST PERSON

Orthopaedic surgeon Ned Schwentker describes how a part-time project helping Honduran children in need became permanent

MY FIRST TRIP TO HONDURAS WAS IN 1995—a short two-week project to San Pedro Sula, accompanied by a resident, a nurse and a medical student, and with that trip I was hooked. I started to make the visit twice a year with a team from Penn State College of Medicine to this northern city, performing a series of corrective orthopaedic surgical procedures on children and offering training to Honduran orthopaedic surgeons.

I am blessed to be in a profession where I can serve others, but never before had I encountered so much need or received so much satisfaction from caring for patients and teaching. Inevitably in the last couple of days of each project I would see children who desperately needed treatment but whom we had to leave behind. From the beginning, a dream was born to have a pediatric orthopaedic hospital where my wife and I could work full-time and year-round, a permanent resource for needy children.

In 2004, we affiliated with CURE International, a faith-based organization that has multiple pediatric specialty hospitals throughout the developing world. Construction on a pediatric orthopaedic hospital in San Pedro Sula began in late 2007. In June 2008, after 32 years on the orthopaedic faculty, I retired from the College of Medicine, and my wife and I moved to Honduras that fall.

The hospital opened in January 2009 and saw nearly 800 patients within the first two months. We are not working alone: A dedicated Honduran hospital staff assists us, and I have a wonderful Honduran orthopaedic surgeon as my partner. My wife functions as everything from an assistant hospital administrator to equipment manager in the OR.

I also retain valuable connections with the medical school. We provide global health experiences here for both medical students and residents. In addition, through e-mail I am able to obtain world-class consultations from the medical specialists at the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. This fall, Drs. Spence Reid and Jay Bridgeman, two of my colleagues from the Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation, are coming to San Pedro Sula to help us provide specialty care for musculoskeletal trauma and hand



Jordan Rassulo

A 12-year-old Honduran girl with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis is now on effective treatment.

deformities, respectively.

We are here in Honduras, but in patient care and in teaching we are still very much Penn State.

Dr. Ned Schwentker is medical administrator of CURE International Honduras, a hospital that treats children who have orthopaedic diseases.