

## "When will the doctors see patients?"

That's always the question that greets a London, Ontario medical brigade when it arrives in a Honduran village. It's the question that keeps bringing this five-member team back again and again.

Worried mothers, babes in arms, youngsters gathered round their legs, line up from the early hours of the morning, to have a chance to see a Canadian doctor. Some walk miles in excruciating heat, over dusty roads, for their only chance at health care.

"When will the doctors see patients?" they always want to know.

The London area team – **doctors Fabian Gorodzinsky, Dave McCormack, Paula Donahue, nurse Esther Kern and journalist Julie Carl** – has made four humanitarian trips to this poverty stricken Latin American nation since Hurricane Mitch cut a swath of devastation across the land in 1998.

On their last trip, they adopted the twin villages of Mealer and San Jose del Cayo in the country's northern lowlands. Unemployment is high, children are lucky to stay in school until age 13. Most of the villages' 2,500 residents work in agriculture for what would seem a pittance to Canadians. But they live with such dignity in these close-knit families, welcoming their new Canadian friends with open arms and open hearts.

On that first trip, the Canadian team, with the help of volunteer builders from Canada, the U.S. and Costa Rica, began to build a medical clinic for the villages. The Canadians' goal is to return each year, providing health care in the clinic and helping the villagers with the problems they want to solve.

Top of that list is a new well system. Many of the villages' health problems stem from the putrid water the system now pumps out. It's senseless to continue to treat the same problems – diarrhea, dehydration, serious gastric disorders – said Dr. McCormack, when we should be solving the problem at its source.

The team plans to visit their adopted villages every year, concentrating on fund-raising and gathering medical donations between trips. Every penny donated goes to the Honduran people. All team members pay their own flights and other expenses.

Some may wonder why the team is drawn back to do work that's so physically difficult and emotionally wrenching. But the answer is always found in the people of Honduras.

On that last trip, as a local holy man blessed the clinic on the Canadians' last day in Mealer, he gave thanks for the building. And he thanked God for putting in the hearts of their new Canadian friends the desire to help. That says it all.

Julie Carl, February 2003

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