

2012 February 11

Yes, week two is over. It's been a busy one. This is the first time MMI has sent a team to the island of Palawan. We've been at the northern end of the island at a place that has never had project of any sort in the past. We got a lot of surgery done. The preparations made by the local staff were amazing. We took over two operating rooms and their usual delivery room and a variety of other spaces and the staff simply rearranged how they get their usual jobs done while giving us the all the best they have. It's humbling to have people be so accommodating and so grateful for our coming despite their being considerably inconvenienced. Mind you.... the fact that four of us slept on brand new foam mattresses on the floor of what is usually the anesthesiologists' call room plus anesthesia storage space just might have been somewhat influenced by the death of their only anesthesiologist a year ago and their inability to find a replacement yet. A convenient large delivery room was seconded to us for doing minor surgeries. Their administrative office had several male team members sleeping on mattresses on the floor. When we indicated we needed places for anesthesia supplies and something sturdy enough to support our portable draw-over anesthesia machine a large desk soon appeared with all drawers emptied out. Desk drawers became convenient storage places. The anesthesia machine on half the desktop; the other half could be accessed easily by both Matthew and me, making it easy to share supplies, and we were ready to start. Who knows how and where the administration of the hospital occurred this past week.

Interestingly the medical director commented tonight that our presence proved a real tool for growth with the local staff. Apparently they were quite concerned about whether they could do what was needed this week. As they tackled their added tasks and learned how much they could handle their confidence had a real boost.... a rather useful side-effect of our presence!

Manila airport:

I didn't get a chance to finish this until now. We've now said all our goodbyes and been very aware of how close we've become over two weeks. It's so amazing to work for two weeks without hearing anyone complain about what they are being asked to do or how long the day is. As one person said on day 1; 'I now know what a 12 hour shift feels like!' The team has been amazing. 'General helpers' who wondered if they would be any use here have found themselves very busy indeed and are already thinking of their next project. One memorable general helper is usually an Interior Designer. For years she has wanted to serve on one of these projects and finally did so. She cheerfully scrubbed bloody instruments except when she was on hands and knees cleaning the operating room floors between cases (no mop could be found.) Definitely a new dimension of interior design!

Our one concern as we left Taytay was leaving a potentially unstable patient who had been operated on the night before we left. We had finished packing up when a lady came in with an intrauterine death. Turned out she also had a ruptured uterus. Fixing the internal mess took several hours. I was glad the Filipino anesthesiologist was 'volunteered' for the job. We can only pray she recovers uneventfully because the nearest surgical resource is four hours away.

Matthew (the senior anesthesia resident with me) has adjusted very readily to our rather non-standard anesthesia set-ups. Matthew has worked enough on projects in developing countries (and our Canadian North) prior to medical school to be familiar with making do with whatever is available.

And now we head home. If only I can get all my overweight carry-ons on the plane with me.....Hhhmmm

Alison