

Yes..The government hospital in the city of Luna in Apayao, northern Luzon, announced on every scrub suit and bedsheet that we were working the far north hospital and training center. Nonetheless it was still definitely useful to have an air conditioner in the OR and sleeping areas.

We certainly received a warm welcome and clear evidence that they had done everything possible to make our stay as comfortable as they could. Turns out there are no hotels or guest houses in the town. They debated about billeting us in private homes but settled instead on turning two offices and two other rooms into sleeping quarters. Brand new foam mattresses with brand new sheets squeezed in wall to wall made it clear how hard they had tried. We ended up quite satisfied with the arrangements. I would have hated to end up in the home of the perpetually-soused mayor for the week!

I don't know if their x-ray machine actually is functional. In any case they certainly didn't use it all week since the 'x-ray department' became our makeshift dining room, where we had fantastic meals brought in to us three times a day with snacks at appropriate intervals.

We learned that Apayao is the 4th poorest province out of about 76 provinces in the Philippines, and I think that was reflected in the huge response to having a surgical team present. We were inundated with patients. The town happens to be the birthplace of one of the Filipino surgeons who is often on MMI teams here in Asia. I suspect that contributed to Jun's difficulty with saying 'no we can't' while he was screening, and we ended up with a rather bruising schedule, including one all-nighter running an ICU on a patient following complex kidney surgery. I have some great pictures of our makeshift version of a 'Hotline blood warmer' from that night! The bag of slightly expired Dopamine the pharmacy gave me also proved very useful. Nancy Ghazar ran the 1:30 to 5:30 shift (by which time Emerson was extubated and expressing his gratitude to all). That earned her the right to sleeping until noon before returning to another list of patients at her table. It was amazing during that night to see how our team (most of whom I'd never seen before) meshed together with exactly the skills we needed. One team member is an ICU nurse in Kitchener. She has used the brand of monitor this hospital had in it's OR, and knew it should have more modules that had been attached to it when we arrived. Soon she was rifling through storage drawers looking for components only she would recognize. We ended up with more thoroughly-monitored patient than I have ever worked with on a project. Another of the team members is a Critical care nurse born in northern Luzon. Needless to say she was glued to Recovery Room duty -- the only one of us North American volunteers who could actually speak the local dialect.

In the end we did 52 major surgeries and 151 'lumps and bumps' under local anesthesia over the 4 days we worked there. And we left with oft-repeated reminders that we needed to come back. We left quite tired. Fortunately the project director had built in some sightseeing over the last two days as we found our way back to Manila by combination of road and plane. The 'far north' doesn't have it's own airport, to say the least.

Early tomorrow we head to the airport yet again, this time to fly to General Santos to work at T'boli. And now.... I'm off to eat yet again!

Alison