

**2010 January 23**

Well... another week is over and we left the island of Leyte this morning to take the ferry over to Cebu for our R&R day.

It's hard to believe the team has just been together for a week. It's amazing how a disparate group of people – most of whom have never seen each other before-- can gel very quickly when everyone is committed to a common purpose. We have two pre-med students and one pre-dentistry student on the team who were listed as general helpers but have been in the fray holding retractors, recording the delivery of the most-photographed Filipino baby of the year at an urgent C-section that appeared at the emergency just as we were heading for dinner, and generally having an experience that may well shape the directions they go in the future. Another team member is a delightful woman from Chicago who is doing an endocrinology fellowship currently and is an excellent surgeon.

One amazing thing has been the way three operating nurses from Victoria have dropped into this very unusual setting, adjusted without a protest to the way procedures (including sterile procedures) are modified here because of the limitation of resources, and moved right into training the student nurses who came done from their respective schools to take advantage of the high volume surgery exposure that we have provided this past week. The 'Victoria threesome' of nurses has been extremely effective.

Our glut of learners has created crowd conditions in an operating room that was designed for one operating table, in which we needed to run two tables simultaneously. I quickly learned that Chantelle and I could concentrate on getting the first patient anesthetized on her table, but then there was no way you could bring a second patient in until all the 'sterile bodies' plus their equipment were safely grouped around their site and a pathway opened up to the next table so I could get started. But....we've managed; nobody has gotten their back up about the conditions, and a good deal of surgery has been performed. (33 major operations and 15 minors)

We've actually been running 4 tables most of the time with cases under regional anesthetics or local anesthesia (the 'lumps and bumps' table) being done in a second room. We ended up working 2 long days and then a day off and then our final two days, this being a pattern that gave the overworked staff in Central Supplies time to clean and resterilize equipment on the Wednesday. This schedule also gave us a great break on Wednesday during which we went to a nearby island for a beach day.... also known as a sunburning opportunity for pale North Americans. As Allan Mellicor (the Filipino organizer and surgeon says: we work hard, we pray hard, and we play hard.. so Wednesday and today have been our play days.)

In many ways our most challenging day was last Sunday, when Alfred, Don and I spent several hours trying to figure out whether it was the oxygen tank regulators, the portable anesthetic machines, or both that weren't working properly since their last plane ride. We finally got two working systems about 11 at night. By this time Chantelle had our anesthetic equipment all sorted out and we headed for bed for an early start Monday.

Chantelle has had some new experiences, such as doing a cholecystectomy in a rather large Filipino under a high spinal anesthetic and touch of midazolam. Definitely not the standard KGH anesthetic for this procedure, but it went extremely smoothly. Our monitors' EKG function have been a little unpredictable. We've ended up putting on the electrodes and then praying that if we really need the information the tracing will be there. So far my screen has cooperated for the only nasty-ish arrhythmia I encountered, which could then be readily corrected.

We are grateful that to date the patients have all done well. And now it's time for bed and then on to T'boli tomorrow.

Alison