

Here I am, apparently in the largest shopping mall in the world, threatened with a meal at a Burger King after being fed incredible Filipino meals for the last 5 days. I decided an Internet cafe was a better option.

In case any one's been watching nasty news.... we're all fine. We have been at the opposite end of the country. The week has been amazing. Once again, a rather 'motley' (in terms of skill sets) collection of volunteers were blended into a very effective team. Although we have four nurses and one LPN on the team only one had ever been in an operating room. As I was unpacking anesthesia equipment on Sunday afternoon I followed Alfred's voice (Alfred's the Filipino OR nurse that organizes all the resources for these trips) and came upon a group of rather petrified-looking volunteers being given a lesson in how to scrub, how to gown and glove, the names of the basic instruments and the commonest sequences in which will be asked for. I warned our project director that we'd better plan for a gentle start the next morning.... and it was amazing to see how quickly skills developed. We were blessed by two special people in the group. One was a nurse (Karen) who never hesitated to ask for clarification or help. You need those people who actually verbalize the worries that others are stewing over silently! the other was a former OR nurse who had been retired for decades but still remembered the OR routines and coached the newbies from the sidelines for the first few days. Truth be told.... you don't need to know the name of the latest fancy instrument when there is no chance it will be on the instrument tray, so being retired for many years wasn't a problem. The nurses ended up doing a great job. Amazing!

One neat thing this trip was the involvement of 3 Filipino surgeons from the hospital Allan works at when in Cagayan de Oro. They were all three incredibly gifted surgeons. I doubt I'll forget the seamless cooperation and coordination of Tisha and Steve while they painstakingly excised a moderately large cystic hygroma from the neck of a 9.4 Kg 1 year old boy. It was like they were coordinating their movements with a single brain. If I'd known how skilled they were I might have agreed to start the case before the final blood crossmatch had been done in the nearest city (45 min away). We never used the blood. In the other OR the other team was whipping out thyroids with incredible efficiency. I'm not sure if their max was 7 or 8 in a day? We actually ran out of cases by noon yesterday. It did give us time to pack up for our early departure this morning. We did 44 major cases (two of whom each had three operative procedures... the long ones were always on my table somehow...) At the same time a local doctor did a large number of minor procedures in the ER.

Jason has done a great job (I can always count on that with our Queen's residents). Our set-up day in the OR was definitely a bit of operating room culture shock.... but Jason adjusted to it well. It is unnerving to look for what you're used to and over and over again the answer is "we don't have it". He was busy doing little one-year olds with cleft lip and palates most of the week so he hasn't had a chance to solo with the 'anesthesia machine in a suitcase' yet. Our fittings for it aren't great for really little kids.

Now we're off for an 8 hour van ride up into the mountain province of northern Luzon. We'll do some tourist things this weekend and then work in a government hospital in Bontoc.

And now I need to run and climb in that van....
And thanks for your prayers and encouragement.

Alison