

During the last ten days of a very cold Michigan, January 21-31, Dr. Jim and Martha Hines enjoyed brilliant sunshine and temperatures in the 90's (degrees Fahrenheit). No, they were not vacationing at a seaside resort. They were participating in a Global Health Outreach (GHO) Medical trip to Managua, Nicaragua.

Medical mission trips to underdeveloped countries are not a new experience for Dr. and Mrs. Hines. They have spent as much as two and a half years at a time, living and working in central Africa. This particular trip was a new experience for them in several ways.

First of all, Jim is used to being the leader of teams of medical personnel, residents, students and other volunteers. On this occasion, he, as an obstetrician-gynecologist, and Martha, an RN, were team members, able to focus on the patients and their needs, without worrying about team logistics and the responsibilities that go with team leadership. It allowed them the luxury of time with people, and increased the enjoyment and productivity of each encounter.

Time spent was significant, because, while the Hines, both speak French, this was their first time to work in a Spanish-speaking country. They relied heavily on their interpreters, who were an integral part of the team.

Possible the most significant difference about this trip was its focus on the needs of "trafficked women." The team's base of operation was Casa Esperanza (House of Hope), a place of refuge and rehabilitation for women and girls who have, in one way or another, been caught up into prostitution and the "sex trade." What an eye-opening experience! Over fifty women and girls, many with children of their own, live at House of Hope. Learning "the trade" from their own mothers and grandmothers, they have never known a father, and "step-fathers" (usually the Pimp) abused them. Neither do they know the fathers of their own children, because of their multiple relationships. Girls (the youngest currently at House of Hope is seven year old!) are often forced or sold to child brothels. Prostitution is legal, but not "regulated" in Nicaragua, and is openly advertised. Prostitution is often accompanied by drug and alcohol addiction. You can imagine the myriad of physical health concerns, as well as the psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs present in these girls. We examined and treated over 1750 patients in Managua, Nicaragua. What a busy week!

Jim and Martha were so pleased to see the good work being done the staff at House of Hope, and to be able to participate in the health and healing being offered there. They are not sure if they will be able to return to Managua in the future, but the girls and women they met there will always be on their hearts.

