

## Seva Diligence Trip Report: March 11, 2013 San Benito, Guatemala

**CONDUCTED BY:** Elliott Gilson and Jason Windebank

**SEVA PROGRAM PARTNER VISITED:** Vizualiza: Vicente Pescatore Clinica de Ojos

**MEETING WITH:** Douglas (clinic manager), Dr. Edgar Ogaldez (Surgeon), Dr. Carmen Cita (Anesthesiologist)

**BACKGROUND:** Visualiza is a Guatemala eye care organization which has a strong relationship with SEVA Foundation, a U.S.-based non-profit which Focusing Philanthropy supports. The purpose of the visit was to further assess and monitor the relationship between SEVA and an important local partner – and to assess the impact of this partnership in the field. For example, Visualiza performed 198 of the 4,208 sight-restoring surgeries Focusing Philanthropy funded through its 2012 World Sight Day campaign.

Pescatore Clinica de Ojos is one of Visualiza's two eye treatment clinics in Guatemala. Pescatore has been in existence since 1998 and enjoys an outstanding reputation in northern Guatemala. Its primary services include testing for vision problems like cataracts and glaucoma, providing prescription glasses to correct basic vision problems, and performing cataract surgeries on site. On average, over 200 patients are tested or treated each workday and eight cataract surgeries are performed each afternoon.

Pescatore operations are subsidized by charitable donations and it receives contributions of equipment and basic supplies from local government agencies and small local donors. The direct costs for individual surgical procedures are paid for by those patients with sufficient financial resources (around 50% of the cases). The direct costs for the remaining procedures are funded by outside donations, a significant portion of which comes from SEVA.

**OBSERVATIONS:** Upon arriving at the clinic, we found a long line reaching out the door and onto the sidewalk in front of the clinic. We were told the large number of patients was due to an outreach program in the Las Cruces area which took place on the two days immediately prior to our visit. The patients received preliminary testing at the outreach event in Las Cruces and those needing treatment were bussed to San Benito this morning (the bus provided by the clinic). Over 400 people were seen at the outreach event, over 200 of whom were brought to the Clinic for further testing today. Around 80% of those visiting the clinic will receive some form of treatment, mostly prescription eyeglasses.



The facility was clean and well organized, and the patients appeared comfortable in the waiting area despite an apparent long wait (necessary considering they are bussed in together). The vision testing room featured fairly

modern testing equipment, was quiet and air conditioned, and was occupied by a vision doctor and a steady stream of patients. Several adjacent testing rooms were unused while we were there. These contained more advanced equipment for specialty tests. A full-service eyeglass storefront is situated adjacent to the lobby where most patients are sent for eyeglass fitting.

Patients with severe cataract problems are immediately prepared for surgery to take place on the same day due to the long distances patients travel to the clinic. This involves explaining the surgical procedure to the patients through a counselor, including risks, recovery procedure, etc. Patients are then sent to the surgery room where several nurses prepare the patients and place them on operating tables. There are four tables in the surgery room, which is clean and appears to be held to a standard of cleanliness that approaches that of a western medical clinic. The surgery room was full with four patients prepared for surgery while we were there. Dr. Edgar Ogaldez performs all surgeries at the clinic and is on-site 15 days each month. He is 33 years old and has performed around 3,000 cataract surgeries to date. Despite his young age, Dr. Ogaldez impressed us as a remarkably knowledgeable, experienced, and professional surgeon with extraordinary stamina. We give him the highest possible words of praise. He permitted us to sit in on two surgeries so we could understand the process.



*Dr. Ogaldez and Dr. Cita in the surgery prep room*

The surgical procedure used is called "small incision cataract surgery", a manual surgical procedure which does not require the more complicated and very costly equipment used for cataract surgery performed in a western country. The procedure is delicate as the clouded natural lens of the eye (which appears brown and milky in color) is removed through an incision, then replaced with an artificial lens. As in western countries, the vast majority of patients here receive local anesthesia for the procedure. Some patients, like children, receive general anesthesia when necessary. The procedure is not painful - there was no indication the patients were suffering any significant discomfort. The entire process takes around 10 minutes. Patients are then sent to a recovery room which appeared basic (padded foam on the floor). Follow-up testing is done the next day. Then the patients are sent home.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS:** Our overall impression from the visit was quite positive, with Visualiza capabilities and performance at its Pescatore Clinic at or above our expectations.

**ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

- Discussion of Visualiza’s overall structure, financial conditions, controls and the like were deferred, pending a visit to Visualiza’s headquarters and primary operating venue in Guatemala City. This visit is scheduled for Wednesday, March 13, 2013.
- Patients are not required to be Guatemalan. Some patients come from neighboring countries.

