

A world of help

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Imagine watching your feverish baby writhing in pain from a simple ear ache, but lack of medicine or a doctor means your child's eardrum will burst before you can get him help.

That is what people in rural Nicaragua experience despite efforts by Springfield-based Rainbow Network to provide regular medical care. The economic disaster that started in the last decade has left the faith-based aid agency with half the doctors it once employed to care for more than 100 small, rural communities.

That means a child with an ear infection must wait as long as three weeks before a doctor can provide the antibiotics needed, or a woman with a broken wrist must wrap it with a dirty rag for weeks until it can be set.



Dr. Jose Dominguez examines a young boy's ears during a four-day medical mission trip to Nicaragua with Rainbow Network in February.



Dr. Will Moore of Springfield has some fun with a boy during a physical exam in Nicaragua. Moore was on a 10-person medical mission team with Rainbow Network in February.

Dr. Will Moore of Springfield has seen the impact over the past 10 years that he has been traveling to Nicaragua with Rainbow Network. Last month, Moore and a team of 10 mostly healthcare providers saw 1,600 patients in four days, working side by side with the seven Rainbow Network Nicaraguan doctors.

He saw people with respiratory problems but no access to simple inhalers, with parasites and diarrhea, painful joints and muscles that could be relieved by a dose of aspirin or ibuprofen, kidney disease that

will eventually take their lives, and much more. He knows that, with twice the number of Rainbow doctors, most of those people would have access to care on a weekly basis. "That would be my Christmas present," Moore says.

Overwhelming need

"What we really need is money," Keith Jaspers, founder and director of Rainbow

Network, says matter-of-factly. “One of our greatest needs is money for doctors. We had 14 before the recession. For \$80,000 a year, we could hire five or six doctors and pay for all the medications and transportation for them.”

Individuals and churches support Rainbow Network, but the recession has forced many to cut back while expenses have risen in Nicaragua. Jaspers hopes that an improving economy and the realization that the goal is reasonable will lead supporters to respond. education.

“People here can make such a difference in the lives of people there,” says Jaspers. “The need is so overwhelming.”

Rochelle Collette has seen that need. The music director at Wesley United Methodist Church, Collette’s other skill is Spanish. In fact, she has learned the technical language of medicine and is an important part of the medical team from the church, including Moore that goes to Nicaragua every February.

“Four years ago, they had more doctors,” she recalls of her first trip. “This year, they are down to seven. It makes a difference ... you still have the same amount of area, of population. ... You still have the same number of people getting sick.”

She saw mothers holding their feverish babies, a woman with sky-high blood pressure, children with punctured eardrums, the woman with a broken wrist. She helped to translate for the

doctors when a woman with Guillain-Barre syndrome – a disorder that causes the body’s immune system to attack the nervous system – came in with a terrible bedsore after being in the hospital for surgery. “No one had educated her or her family on how to prevent that,” she says.

With the supplies the team brought – all donated locally – the team was able to provide clean catheters and other needs to prevent infection, and a physical therapist taught the woman and her family exercises to give her strength.

“It was completely awesome,” says Collette. “It really impacted the team to see a person so hopeful with something so small to us.”

Called to help

Moore and Collette, like most of their team, are motivated by their faith. Moore is the son of

Methodist pastors, Bill and Ginia Moore. “I grew up in the mission field,” he says. “It’s part of my faith and belief. Jesus taught us to feed the hungry, heal the sick.”

Collette shares her stories at church and in her family, but she also takes it to area schools where she tells the students that they could spend 88 cents on a pack of gum or buy a bottle of 175 aspirin that would ease an elderly woman’s arthritis pain for a month. “It’s so easy,” she says.

The doctors in Nicaragua face daunting struggles for minimal pay. But, as Dr. Candido Rios, Rainbow’s medical director, says, “In gratitude to God, it’s a way I can share what I’ve learned, all that God has given me ... I think that a way to share all that love that God has given me is to do what I do every day.”

Jaspers has devoted himself to Rainbow Network since 1998 for a simple reason: “God uses my hands to answer somebody’s prayers.”



Physician's Assistant Debra Nuetzhorn of Springfield examines a baby in her mother's lap during a four-day medical mission trip to Nicaragua with Rainbow Network in February.