

Many Little Hearts and an Occasional Big One

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The Liga Children's Heart Program was created seven years ago. As of this date we have helped to arrange and support cardiac surgery for approximately 50 patients. The majority of operations have been performed at the San Jose Hospital in Ciudad Obregon, Mexico but we have also had patients undergo surgery in Culiacan, Mexico and in Southern California at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Children's Hospital of Los Angeles and at the Loma Linda International Heart Institute. Our cases have ranged from "garden variety" communications between the left and right sides of the heart to critically ill blue babies who would not have been able to survive without surgery. We also arranged support from sources outside the Children's Heart Fund to sponsor surgery for a 52 year old woman who was in danger of stroke or sudden death from a tumor inside her heart. Three of our patients are described below:

When he was an infant, 5½ year old Martin needed two operations in Mexico City in order to survive. However, because of severe narrowing of the arteries in his right lung, an absent pulmonary valve, and a hole between his right and left atrium he had remained cyanotic. In April, Martin and his mother were flown to the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles where he was re-evaluated and surgery was performed with the support of the Larry King Cardiac Foundation. The arteries were repaired and a prosthetic pulmonary valve donated by the Cryolife Corporation was inserted. Three weeks later he was touring Disneyland with his adopted siblings from the family of Juanita and Cruz Ayala, his Los Angeles hosts.

Last June, in Ciudad Obregon, Dr. Aguilar performed a cardiac catheterization on 1½ year old Brigitte. She was very cyanotic. A heart catheterization demonstrated that she had Tetralogy of Fallot, the commonest form of blue baby syndrome. She needed surgery. At the time, however, because many cardiac operations had been performed on Liga patients during 2003 and early 2004, there was not enough money in the bank account of the Children's Heart Program to pay for an operation for Brigitte. During the ensuing weeks her condition worsened and soon became critical. Faced with a desperate situation, we advised Dr. Aguilar and Dr. Loya to go ahead and operate. At the same time we phoned for help from supporters who had already made generous contributions. The surgery went well. Brigitte left the hospital in less than a week and by the end of the following week we had raised the money to pay for the operation. Brigitte continues to do well.

Hermalinda V. is a 52 year old woman. When she arrived at our clinic, her echocardiogram revealed a gelatinous tumor the size of a golf ball inside her heart. Because of its size and location, the flow of blood through her mitral valve was nearly completely obstructed. If the obstruction were to increase or part of the tumor break off and embolize to her brain she could have died or had a stroke at any time. Because she was an adult we were unable to use funds from the Children's Heart Program. However, the Rotary Clubs of Santa Ana North and Saddleback Valley provided an emergency grant and the surgery was successfully performed at the General Hospital of Culiacan.

- In June we examined 27 children with congenital heart disease at our El Fuerte and San Blas clinics.
- Last summer, with the help of the Rotary Clubs of Huntington Beach and Ciudad Obregon and generous individual donors, we were able to purchase a nearly new portable echocardiograph machine to replace our old machine which was no longer functional.

- Drs. Robert Siegel and Saibal Kar from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center have volunteered to bring special equipment to Ciudad Obregon to work with pediatric cardiologist Dr. Paco Aguilar on percutaneous techniques to repair cardiac abnormalities without making an incision in the chest.
- Several Rotary Clubs in California together with the Rotary Club of Ciudad Obregon have submitted a proposal to Rotary International for a grant to help pay for cardiac operations.

Our program continues to grow and expand. We treat and examine patients in three Mexican towns. Operations are performed in hospitals in several cities in both Mexico and the United States. Manufacturers donate equipment. We receive grants from philanthropic organizations and contributions from generous individual donors. We sincerely thank all of you. Without your support our work would not be possible.