

An Evaluation of Primary Eye Care Services Provided by Local Health Promoters in a Remote Area of Guatemala

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Learning Objectives

- Recognize the barriers to eye care access in the Ixcán region of Guatemala
- Assess the effectiveness of a health promoter-based, primary eye care project in an area without access to professional eye care
- Discuss how eye care services and their evaluation can be participatory

The Ixcán

- Northern part of Guatemala in the Department of El Quiché
- Colonized in the mid-1960s by impoverished *campesinos* from different regions of Guatemala who formed successful cooperatives
- One of the first areas to be targeted by the Military in the mid-1970s during widespread repression and war
- Thousands of inhabitants fled to Mexico during the early 1980s and returned *en masse* post-1993.
- An area of cultural and linguistic diversity, with high levels of poverty and low levels of formal education





Barriers to eye health care access

- Poor road and transportation infrastructure
- General poverty
- Few basic clinics in the region; many without medications, equipment or trained personnel
- Eye care not considered to be a “priority” by health sector and general population

But the need exists....

GLOBAL CONTEXT

- In Central America, < 5 eye care professionals per 100,000 people (UNESCO)
 - In the US, there are 36 / 100,000
- VISION 2020 of the WHO aims to reduce preventable blindness in world to < 0.5% by 2020
 - Blindness in Guatemala due to cataracts is 4.1%

PEDRO
health
promoter

1996



ENFOQUE IXCAN

(ain-FO-kay eesh-CON)

PRIMARY EYECARE FOR THE IXCAN REGION OF GUATEMALA

- Started by Scott Pike, Optometrist from Oregon, in 1997
- Initial project took place in Santa Maria Tzejá, Ixcán
 - A community with many returnees from Mexico as well as community members who stayed during the war
- From 1998 to 2005, an estimated 220 people were served from 18 villages in the Ixcán

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Create referral networks so that health promoters can:

- Refer health problems needing professional care to appropriate Guatemalan health professionals.

SCOTT PIKE TEACHING PEDRO OCCULAR ANATOMY







Pedro and Felipe working with community member

Assessment of the effectiveness of EI work, 2006

The process

- Basic questionnaire designed by co-authors
- List of service recipients developed by health promoters

Assessment of the effectiveness of EI work, 2006

The process

- Middle school students in Sta. Maria Tzeja trained by a Mexican researcher to follow-up with recipients, gain informed consent, apply the questionnaire, create a database and analyze data in Excel
 - 11 hours of training
 - 9 students selected by Middle School Director, Randall Shea
 - 3 from each of the 7th, 8th and 9th grade classes
 - 15 to 22 yrs old
- Randall monitored students' progress over one month



**Randall Shea in the classroom
with youth in Santa Maria Tzejá**

RESULTS

63 people surveyed (29% of total people served, 1998-2005)

38 (60%) Male

25 (40%) Female

EYEGLASSES

52 people (84%) received glasses

OF THESE 52 PEOPLE

- 92% said glasses help them

- 83% use their glasses on a daily basis

- 85% said glasses are for near work or reading

- 87% paid less than \$3.50 for their exam and glasses and were pleased with this

SURGERY

7 people (11%) received 12 surgeries at Visualiza (eye clinic in Guatemala City)

OF THESE 7 PEOPLE

- 10 surgeries for cataracts

- 5 people had cataract surgery done on both eyes

- 2 people: growth removed from their corneas

- 100% of the surgeries had positive outcomes

Community Participation

Middle School Students

Naybi: “What I liked a lot was that when we interviewed people our timidity went away and we made a connection with the people and made friendships”

Randall Shea: “The objective of promoting self-confidence and self-esteem in the students through the learning of new skills, and by stepping out of the classroom and into the larger world was accomplished. The patient interview process, the data entry process, the data summarization and analysis process, the report writing process and the public presentation of their findings were all rich learning experiences for the students...”

Community Participation

Health Care Promoters

Pedro: “Here in Santa Maria Tzejá there are many cases. I have become aware of patients in neighboring communities also.”

Overall Impact of EI: Helping People to See in New Ways

Pedro: “The patients recently referred for cataract surgery at Visualiza wish to express their gratitude.”

Optometrist in Guatemala: “I feel really proud about what EI has achieved. I’m very sure that little by little it’s going to become a real solution to vision problems in the Ixcán.”

Rotary Club President, Guatemala City: “Your efforts bring hope and sight to those who, otherwise, have no access to care.”



3 men who can see, thanks to Enfoque Ixcán

THE CATARACT GANG:

Tomas, Santiago and Sabino

Santa Maria Tzejá, Ixcán

El Quiché, Guatemala