

WITH EYES TO SEE



HEALTH CARE

During this time of heightened national attention on **health care**, the next two editions of *With Eyes to See* will explore this topic. The following activities focus on hopeful models of health care in our world and a list of resources for exploring the health care system in the U.S. We begin with a story...

Dr. Michael Gilbert, a family medicine doctor practicing in Orange, California, visited Concern America's health project in northern Guatemala in June 2009 and tells the following story. It is important to note that the health care provider he mentions, a "health promoter," is a young, indigenous Mayan man with few years of formal education. In northern Guatemala, many communities get their health care services through these community-based health promoters, all volunteers who have been trained by Concern America to be the primary health care providers in their villages and regions.

"Tendon Repair"

"While visiting [Guatemala] I had the chance to observe one of the health promoters repair a tendon injury in a young man. This was remarkable in a number of ways. First off, this promoter was a young man for whom Spanish was not his native language. In addition to learning the health promoter curriculum, he had to learn Spanish in order to be successful. Interestingly, perhaps because of these limitations, he had to repeat the first year's curriculum before moving onto the second year curriculum. Yet despite these limitations, this promoter was one of the most professional, caring and thorough caregivers I have ever had the occasion to observe.

"While watching this young promoter care for his patients a teenager came in with a machete injury to his left index finger. The promoter carefully examined the young man, determining he had likely severed his distal extensor tendon, necessitating not just a skin repair but a careful identification and repair of this lacerated tendon.

"Our team [of U.S. trained health professionals] watched somewhat in awe, as the promoter took the injured teen out to the picnic table to prepare for the repair. He used meticulous sterile technique as he set up a sterile field, cleansed the wound and identified the two ends of the severed tendon. Grasping these ends he carefully tied each to the other using the appropriate absorbable suture and figure of 8 ligatures. After repairing and subsequently examining the repair, (continued on page 2)

ideas for
teachers

who want
to
integrate
social
justice
concepts

into what
and how
they teach

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CONCERN AMERICA

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"S/he who has health, has hope. And s/he who has hope, has everything."
-Anonymous

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."
-World Health Organization 1948

(continued from page 1) he closed the overlying skin with interrupted nylon sutures. This was followed by splinting and detailed instruction to the injured party on wound care, infection precautions and follow up. At each step the promoter's actions were precise, thorough and meticulous.

"I came away from this experience deeply impressed with the quality, skill and service these health promoters provide to their community. I had no doubt that without this service this teenager would have been permanently disabled due to his injury. But that with the service and care rendered by this health promoter this teenager would fully recover with the complete use of his finger. In the actions of this young promoter in this remote village in Guatemala not only had the young injured teen been touched and made better, but I had been touched and become a better physician."

This second story comes from Dr. Kate Feibusch, a Concern America field volunteer who has worked in Guatemala since 2000 training health promoters and midwives and helping communities build functioning primary health care systems.

"The Birth Box"

"Three weeks after the last [health promoter] course, Pregnancy and Child Birth, there was a knock on Jose's door at midnight. It was a neighbor asking for help. His wife was in labor. Their village is a three-hour-hike to the road, and then a four-hour drive to the hospital. "I didn't want to go, because this man had made fun of my studies, but my father told me to go. He said, 'What are you studying [to be a health promoter] for if you don't go?'" When Jose arrived at the house, a thatch hut with no electricity and a dirt floor like all the others in the village, he found the exhausted wife with a breech delivery. The body had come out, but the arms and head were stuck, as so often happens. "I was scared, but I just tried to remember the box."

"During the Pregnancy and Child Birth course, every health promoter in the course came to the front of the class and "received a breech birth" from the "birth box," allowing their hands to learn how to extract the head from the pelvis. "I just kept thinking, 'It's not a woman, it's a box,'" said Jose. Finally, he was able to free the baby's head, effectively saving the woman's life, and forever establishing his position as the village health care worker."



A Health Care Model that Works

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In today's health care reform debate in the U.S. there are few stories, such as those on pages 1 and 2 of this newsletter, of high-quality, low-cost health care solutions serving people without health insurance. What does the model of health care described in these stories look like? What would it be like to envision such a system in our communities here in the U.S.? Try the following activities with the students to explore these questions:

What is the Model?

1. Read the "Tendon Repair" and "The Birth Box" stories (pages 1 and 2) to the students. If necessary, define a few of the terms used in the stories (tendon, sterile field, suture, breech delivery, thatch hut, etc.) before sharing the stories. Also, if there is classroom access to the internet, watch the video "Concern America's Primary Health Care Model" found through Concern America's website (see page 4 for details); the video clip does a good job in further explaining Concern America's health work in Latin America.
2. On one side of a sheet of paper, have the students list the aspects of the stories that sound like the health care they have received (and/or see on TV in this country). On the other side of the paper, have them list the aspects of the story that are unlike the health care model they know (for younger students, have them make two drawings based on the differences).
3. As a class, compare the two lists (or pictures) that have been created. The point of the discussion is to get the students to learn and think about a model of health care that is providing good care to people who do not have health insurance, and many of whom live on less than \$2/day.

Can You Imagine It?

The core of Concern America's health promoter model in Guatemala and Latin America are the volunteer health promoters themselves who are chosen by their villages to be trained to be their primary health care providers. What would such a system look like in our neighborhoods here in the U.S.?

1. Do the "What is the Model" activity above.
2. Ask the students to think about their own neighborhoods/blocks, and make a list of people they know who might be elected by their neighbors to be their community health promoter (similar to the process actually used in Latin America). In groups of four, have the students talk about the persons they listed and why they chose each person (i.e. what criteria did they use when creating their lists).
3. In the same small groups, and then as a class, have the students talk about what it would feel like to go to this person when they are sick (instead of their doctor/hospital).

NOTE: A difference between this health promoter model and the health care system in the U.S. is that medicines that are only available by a prescription in this country can be purchased without a prescription in most countries of Latin America. Also, the health promoters are volunteers and the medicines they use are generics that cost very little so that a typical health consult with necessary lab tests and medicines costs between \$1.00-\$5.00!

"The 'I' in illness is isolation, and the crucial letters in wellness are 'we'."
- Author unknown

"Financial ruin from medical bills is almost exclusively an American disease."
- Roul Turley

Primer on the Health Care Debate in the United States

It is not the intention of this edition of *With Eyes to See* to try to explore the many complexities of the health care debate in the U.S. However, for teachers wishing to delve into this important issue, one suggestion is to use a series of six lesson plans and resource materials from PBS's Newshour, National Discussion and Debate Series: Health Care. See page 4 for more information on this resource.

RECOMMENDED

"Great physicians and nurses, skilled, caring and unparalleled in their training, intervened in my life and probably saved it. I was lucky but other Americans are not. It is time to speak again and stand again for the ideal that in the richest nation ever on this planet, it is wrong for 41 million Americans, most of them in working families, to worry at night and wake up in the morning without the basic protection of health insurance."
- Senator John Kerry

RESOURCES

- For more information on Concern America's health promoter training model visit Concern America's website, www.concernamerica.org. At the site visit the "Field Programs" section and click on the "Community Health" link. Many stories can also be found by downloading recent Concern America Newsletters and watching the "Concern America's Primary Health Care Model" video clip.

- *PBS's Newshour, National Discussion and Debate Series: Health Care* is a good resource for looking at the many factors that make the current health care reform debate so difficult. The corresponding website has six lesson plans on issues from health insurance to whether or not health care is a right or a privilege. The site also has a list of resources for further study and the correlation of the lessons to national education standards. (www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/us/jan-june08/miller_healthcare.html)

- One edition of YES! magazine in 2006 was dedicated to health care. All of the articles are available online and include *Health Care: It's What Ails Us*, by Doug Pibel and Sarah van Gelder: "Americans spend the most, get the least, and have no health care security. The solution is not that difficult", and *Has Canada Got the Cure?*, by Holly Dressel: "Canadians are now healthier and live longer than Americans. What happened?" (www.yesmagazine.org/issues/health-care-for-all/table-of-contents)

CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Mozambique, and West Africa.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in California which include:

- * Walk Out of Poverty
- * Infusion Methodology Workshops for teachers
- * "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- * School and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- * Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

Mark Your Calendars: Concern America's 13th Annual Walk Out of Poverty and 3rd Annual Dance Out of Poverty: March 27, 2010

For more than a decade Concern America has held the increasingly successful Walk Out of Poverty in southern California, an event that provides education for the participants and a sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, while raising money for Concern America's development work in Latin America and Africa. In 2008, Concern America held its first annual Dance Out of Poverty with the same goals. If you live in the Orange County, California or Chicago, Illinois regions, join us!



Call Concern America to get information, walk packets, posters, flyers, and/or to schedule a presentation for your group. In the Chicago region, call 773-772-9523.