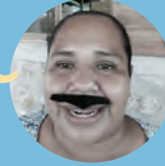


Summer 2021 Newsletter



Remembering
Dr. John Emrich



Dear Friends,

As we reflect on a season of changes, from springtime to warmer summer weather to the learning and growing out of our time in quarantine, we are reminded of the song “*Todo Cambia*” (Everything Changes). The song was written by the Chilean singer/songwriter Julio Numhauser who, due to the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, was forced to flee his country for safety in 1973. This song is a dedication to his beloved country and people as someone living in exile, and one that speaks to anyone who is unable to be home, much like so many of the people Concern America has worked with over our long history.

Made popular by the Argentinian singer Mercedes Sosa, “*Todo Cambia*” speaks to the consistency of change in our lives, like leaves in the spring and our hair as we grow older. While somewhat sorrowful, the words are also filled with hope and comfort in what changes can bring. The song ends with the moving sentiment, “But what does not change, no matter how far away we may be, are our love, memories, and pain of our community and our people.”

In May of this year, long-time field volunteer and dear friend Dr. John Emrich passed away suddenly. As we mourn his loss, we reflect on how John has changed our world and the lives of hundreds of thousands of people forever. Though he is not here physically, his same smiley demeanor, his love of people, and his belief that anyone could become a healer have been transformed into the daily service of the thousands of midwives, health promoter practitioners, and medical students that he trained.

We dedicate this newsletter to John, sharing photos, stories, and information on many of the ways he has touched our lives and built local capacity in health care across several countries. Please join us in getting to know and remembering John and to hold his wife Susan and their family in your hearts in these challenging days. Susan extends her deepest thanks to everyone in the Concern community that has reached out to her in recent days, and to the groups in Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia who have held their own services and gatherings to celebrate John (as seen in the photos above).

With deep sadness and gratitude,

Concern America Staff



John's Path to Concern America

Soon after completing his medical degree, and Susan, his wife, her degree in biology, they and their children packed up their VW bus and drove south, eventually landing in Guatemala in 1972. Through earthquakes in Nicaragua and Guatemala, civil wars from Mexico to Colombia, and extreme material poverty throughout, all while raising their two children, Susan and

John followed their calling to help communities address their severe lack of health care. In 1979, they crossed paths with Concern America in the Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras, and our relationship grew ever since. John's impact in health care is immeasurable, and here are just a few examples and photos of his transformational work.

Health Promoter Practitioner Model

At the core of his being, John was a teacher. From guiding a practitioner during their first tendon repair procedure to creating education worksheets about COVID safety concerns for his neighbors, he would take every opportunity to ensure that those around him had the opportunity to learn and grow in health care. His belief that education should be accessible, applicable, and based on dialogue and experience helped build the foundation for Concern America's transformational health promoter practitioner model. Unparalleled in its quality of instruction and accessibility to those with little formal education,

the model builds local capacity to a depth of knowledge and level of care comparable to nurse practitioners. Additionally, John was instrumental in developing the materials for Concern America's 23-book manual *How To Teach Health* which are the teaching and student guides for the three-year standardized courses of study that include diagnosis, treatment, and preventive care.



Midwife Training

In each country he worked, from Mexico to Colombia, John would be invited to lead midwife trainings, with course topics that included technical skills in delivery, prenatal assessments, nutrition, disabilities, reproductive health, early-child development, and women's rights. He knew the incredible value of

these traditional health care workers and was firmly committed to supporting and building upon their existing knowledge and experience. He wrote: "Over the years, the need for more midwives has grown. They are called to attend births in communities as far as eight to ten hours from the nearest hospital. There is such a need to continue training midwives, as no one else is doing it, especially not in their own languages."



Pasante Program and More

As another testament to John's commitment to education and learning, he was crucial in training and accompanying hundreds of university students during their residency in rural Chiapas. Mexican medical students must give a year of social service as part of their training, and John worked with numerous cohorts of students who were placed in the rural and isolated regions of Chiapas, Mexico. Most of the *pasantes*, as they are called, are students trained in formal and urban environments, and John helped them adjust to the drastic

changes of living and practicing medicine in indigenous communities with little access to advanced equipment, resources, and basic services like water and electricity. Additionally, John supported the residents as they began to work with and train local community health care providers as well. As if all of this wasn't enough, during his years in Chiapas, John also organized and supervised the Tuberculosis program for the local health department!



Indispensable

When memory fails us it is difficult to remember dates, or what day or year it is, but in the end, these are no more than just passing details taking up the space of memories we don't want to lose.

When we met John, when we had the time to really get to know and enjoy him, we were somewhere between Palenque and San Cristóbal, eating pizza and ice cream; it was a short time, a few hours perhaps, who knows, but when we returned home, we knew we had just met one of the indispensables of our world. One of those people, as someone once said, who "fights for others their entire life," and who, if you are lucky enough to meet, you will make room in your memory and in your heart in order to remember forever.

Though we were always part of the same "Chiapas team," there were many kilometers and curves in the road that separated us for long stretches of time, but when you meet one of the indispensable ones, this time and space doesn't matter because when they are near you once again, they continue to teach you, and you marvel at their humanity, their integrity, and their smile.

When one of these indispensable ones leaves us, when their time walking on this earth is over, they take with them all their lived experiences, adventures, travels, and life stories, but part of these adventures remain here living within us because of that first moment when we created that space in our memories and in our hearts.

John, you will always inspire us as we continue our journey...have a good trip dear friend.

-Alicia and Ilhui, Concern America Field Volunteers, Mexico



One of the things I will always remember John teaching us was for when we are attending complicated cases and we are attending patients who have signs of shock and the family crying. He'd say, 'The health worker who is assisting the patient has to be strong for those cases and not cry. We have to do what we have to do to get the patient out of the crisis.' Those words are always in my memory, but when I found out of John's passing, my eyes filled with tears.

- Macaria, Health Promoter Practitioner, Guatemala

When you share the goodness of your heart, you always end up winning because life is an echo, it gives you back what you have given. I have your example of the fight for health, all the years of service to the community.

- Eva, Health Promoter Practitioner, Guatemala



Upcoming Events

Grow a Global Heart Auction

Save the date for our virtual auction October 23, 2021.

Join us for an exciting evening and the opportunity to bid on unique items and experiences!