

# *Roughing It:* Columbia Nurse Anesthetists Take Their Training to Rural Ecuador

*Annual Report 2008-09 • 13*

Malfunctioning monitors, no electronic identification system, an improvised scavenger exhaust system: this scenario may not seem the best environment within which to provide anesthesia. Yet for Carlyne Moran and Sooyeng Moore, two Columbia nurse anesthesia students, the challenging conditions proved not only an opportunity to hone their skills in a unique setting, but an occasion to bring sorely needed care to patients far from Washington Heights. This May, when many of their classmates were headed to the beaches to celebrate the long Memorial Day weekend, these two students boarded a flight

to Guayaquil, Ecuador. There was then 90 minute drive to Babahoyo, a city of 250,000 people who are mostly poor and lacking health care. Accompanied by Laura Ardizzone, CRNA, MS, Director of Clinical Education of the School's Nurse Anesthesia Program, they were part of 30 member medical mission organized by Blanca's House, a Long Island-based nonprofit organization. "I thought joining the medical mission would be great for Columbia and, more importantly, an educational and eye-opening experience for the students," Ardizzone said. After arranging for

medivac insurance, malaria and typhoid vaccinations, the three set off for Ecuador. One of Babahoyo's private clinics, housed in a seven-story building, played host to the mission. Even though the clinic was privately operated, it lacked most of the equipment Columbia's nurse anesthetists had learned with. "We packed all of the equipment we would need to run an OR," Ardizzone said. "You can imagine how baffled the Ecuadorian customs agents were when we showed up with suitcases and bins full of monitors, scalpels and masks."



*Blanca's House volunteers and faculty member Laura Ardizzone with a young patient prior to her surgery*

The team was in Babahoyo for only three days and their arrival had been announced to those needing care. "The town's residents were lined up around the block and they started clapping as we entered building. It was a life-changing experience," she said. The crush of patients meant 12-hour days with little time to rest between patients. "We learned to do things differently," Ardizzone said. "One day our anesthesia machine went down. So instead of giving general anesthesia to patients, we gave them a spinal so that we could continue to move patients through. That's the sort experience the students

aren't going to get anywhere else." During their stay, Ardizzone estimates the anesthesia team assisted in nearly 200 procedures, including hernia repairs, endoscopies, laparoscopies and cholecystectomies. Working conditions could be primitive. Lacking electronic identification systems, team members wrote the patients' medications and allergies on their gowns. Several of the monitors were damaged in transit. "We had to be creative and rely on our basic skills, using our eyes and our stethoscopes. We became the number one monitor," Ardizzone said. On their last

day in Babahoyo, the Columbia team visited a local school to hand out gifts to the schoolchildren. Back at the Columbia School of Nursing, the two students and Ardizzone delivered a presentation for the other anesthesia students, including a slideshow of the improvisations they had engineered. A second trip is planned for next spring. "If you think you have to wait until a year or two of training before you can do this, well, you don't," Carlyne said. "You will definitely be challenged, but it's very rewarding."



*Student Sooyend Moore (bottom right, kneeling) visiting with schoolchildren in rural Babahoyo, Ecuador*



*Faculty member Laura Ardizzone entertaining a 7 month old prior to his surgery*