

Maryland Surgeons Give Back so Others Can Live a Better Life

As the holiday season begins, a Maryland nonprofit demonstrates its commitment to helping those less fortunate during economic, political, and social upheaval.

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, November 20, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Just a few weeks before departing for their medical mission in Ecuador, co-founder of Operation Walk Maryland, Maria Khanuja, learned that Presidential Candidate Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated during nationwide disruption taking over the once tranquil coastal country. To make matters worse, she was struggling to get in touch with her in-country contact, delaying the necessary paperwork needed to ship twelve pallets of donated equipment and medicine across the continent. A cancellation this close to patients' surgery dates would lead to more than \$100,000 in funds and supplies to be wasted. The long-awaited trip was hanging in the balance.



Niza Analuiza received a right knee replacement and looks forward to experiencing life with her family to the fullest, including long walks with her granddaughter free of pain.

Every year, more than fifty Maryland-based healthcare volunteers embark on a week-long medical mission to a developing country to relieve the pain of citizens who otherwise cannot afford or access orthopedic surgeries. From surgeons to physical therapists, sterilization professionals to translators, this team comes from several different healthcare systems and professions at varying stages of their career. However, this year's trip would be very different from those in the past.

Considering the widespread instability and turmoil currently affecting Ecuador, the team recognized an even greater need to restore the health and wellness of more than fifty patients awaiting their arrival. Despite the risks, Operation Walk Maryland did not falter. With uncertainty

at every turn, the team overcame political unrest, corruption, and insufficient resources to deliver a remarkable forty-seven knee and hip replacements in just three days.

When the surgical team was introduced to their workspace in Quito's Padre Carollo Hospital, they were met with an empty room. The night before surgeries were scheduled, the team needed to act quickly to assemble a functional supply room, pulling furniture from various corners of the wing to create make-shift shelves. With so many of our team members working in close proximity to Washington D.C., the barren medical facilities in Ecuador's capital city were a stark contrast.

Countless individuals suffering from debilitating joint conditions like arthritis put their trust in this medical team from distant Maryland. Family members of patients brought comfort to their elders by bridging the language barrier and lending their compassion. They quickly became essential members of the Operation Walk team.

Despite basing our efforts in the rural communities surrounding Quito, patients represented more than just Ecuador. South Americans traveled from as far as Venezuela to receive care and return to a normal life after hearing about the hospital on [Instagram](#). A sidelined female farmer dropped everything and took a four-hour bus one-way for the sheer possibility of being able to provide for her family again after healing.

Patients of Padre Carollo exhibited a level of grit and gratitude that is unlike anything the medical personnel have ever seen. After waking up from major surgeries, they would be up and taking steps within hours. Their heightened pain tolerance and awareness of their good fortune made them appear practically invincible. In the United States, a joint replacement is a common procedure, but not in Ecuador. The patients and their families showed their appreciation in any way they could. Songs, hot and ready treats, and letters did their best to describe how they could have never imagined they would live without pain again.

Operation Walk Maryland pays for all supplies necessary for both operations and recovery by dedicating time to the cause year-round. The marathon of surgeries is impressive by American standards, but the preparation that goes into this labor of love is months in the making. Operation Walk Maryland is making strides to ensure everyone around the world receives the care they need.

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