

# ISHI

INTERNATIONAL SURGICAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

## ISHI Visits Kabala, Sierra Leone 13 Member Team Provides 67 Free Operations



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### UPCOMING MISSIONS

Haiti  
Cameroon  
Sierra Leone  
Philippines

### SAVE THE DATE!

June 10 Volunteers' Picnic,  
Liberty State Park

December Holiday Party



## **ISHI Tackles Surgical Needs in Kabala**

**By Monica Hernandez**

Somewhere out there, in a not-so-far-away land, people let themselves die because their only other option is to walk for days in morbid pain to get to the nearest hospital. Children often succumb to curable diseases, and the lack of simple medical interventions such as blood transfusions or intravenous hydration also result in unnecessary loss of human life.

Scarce access to health care is a common issue in many West African communities and one of the main difficulties faced by the people of Kabala, a town located in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone.

Living past the age of 56 is a privilege in Sierra Leone, and losing a relative to a fatal illness is not unusual. Approximately 70% of the country's population lives in poverty, and its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita barely reaches \$900. This explains why people in Kabala do not have economic resources to pay for medical services. And, even if they did, the rates of physicians and hospital beds in Sierra Leone are currently 0.02% and 0.4%, respectively, per 1,000 people. With such limited resources, it is nearly impossible for the local government to provide adequate medical care to the country's citizens. The need for international aid in Sierra Leone is as evident as the harsh living conditions of its inhabitants. When team ISHI became aware of the true depth of surgical need in this country, and particularly in Kabala, it immediately decided to lend a hand.



According to Ziad Sifri, president of ISHI, the team faced great difficulties during the planning stage of the mission, but not as many as it encountered during the stay in Kabala.

The ISHI team triaged 150 people in only two days, operating on 67 of those people in five days. Additionally, it confronted some challenging emergency cases and had difficult choices to make. Well aware of the limit of resources, inadequacy of infrastructure, and unreliability of electrical power, the team had to choose between playing it safe or taking on life-or-death situations. It decided to take on these challenging cases knowing that the best outcomes could not always be guaranteed, but certain that doing nothing was not an option. The team successfully managed five emergency cases under conditions that would be inconceivable to surgeons and nurses working in high-income countries.

In spite of all difficulties, ISHI volunteers were satisfied knowing that they changed the lives of many people in Kabala. Working long, sleep-deprived hours with persistent stress was insignificant compared to the innumerable demonstrations of appreciation team ISHI received from every patient treated. These expressions of gratitude were truly the mission's greatest reward.

## Nurse's Mission to Rio Dulce Valley Guatemala in October

By Marissa Weekes Mason

Emergency room registered nurse Jhoselyn Thomas remembers her visit to earthquake-ridden Haiti in March.

It was her first mission after having her daughter Izabella, and it was hard being away from her.

The new mother remembers helping 25 patients daily, seeing how they lost everything and some, everyone, while caring for them. But most of all, she remembers their incessant need for nurses.



“I remember being pulled from one area to another. Nurses were always needed,” she said.

Thomas, who usually cares for 6-8 patients daily as an emergency room nurse in the United States, remembers thinking Port-au-Prince did not look that devastated after arriving at night. When she woke up, she saw the physical destruction of the city and the emotional wreckage of its people. “People had lost everything and they still greeted me in the morning with a smile on their face.”

It is from her experience in Haiti that Thomas decided to lead a nurse-driven mission to Guatemala in October 2011, comprised of nine volunteer nurses from the University of Medicine and Dentistry in Newark, New Jersey.

The nurses, who have previous medical mission experience from ISHI surgical missions to Haiti, Guatemala, and other areas include Natalia McTighe RN, Janet Clausen RN, Emma Mensah RN, Stephanie Burroughs RN, Cathy Blaskewicz APN, Michelle Egarian APN, student Caitlin Blaskewicz, and photographer Nura Quereshi.

Thomas thought about leading a team to Guatemala but wasn't sure how to initiate the mission. After speaking with surgeon Dr. Asha Bale who was with her on the Haiti mission, Dr. Bale offered an idea.



“Dr. Bale suggested I contact this group called Jungle Medic. Since they welcome the help of nurses and EMT's, I thought it a perfect opportunity,” said Thomas.

Jungle Medic, an organization founded by Bryan Buchanan, has provided free dental and medical care to 137 remote Mayan Indian villages in the Rio Dulce Izabal area of Guatemala for over 8 years. Thomas and the other nurses partnered with Jungle Medic in October. On ISHI's first nurse-driven mission to Guatemala, the team screened for patients who fit the ISHI needs for surgery including hernias, lipomas, abscesses and other small surgical interventions.



Traveling by boat to the rural areas along the river, the nurses set up clinic at schools and other locations to see patients. Over the week-long mission they saw and treated over 1,000 patients. Many times entire families would visit, each with different physical ailments. The group treated conditions such as cellulitis, body aches, cuts and wounds, dental caries, etc. Translators were key, as the local language spoken was “Kechi”, very different from Spanish.

Thomas and the other nurses fundraised to support the mission by selling cookie dough in time for the holiday season.



**Volunteer Profile: Lourdes Alonso and Carine Jimenez, Dapitan City Philippines**

**By Megan Blaskewicz**

We are very proud to have two new ISHI volunteers, who recently participated in the Dapitan City Mission in the Philippines: Carine Jimenez and Maria Lourdes Alonso. They came all the way from South Sudan to work with the ISHI team.

Carine is from Surigao Del Sur, Mindanao. She completed nursing school in the Philippines and started working in a government hospital soon after graduation. After a few years there she began working as a volunteer nurse for the United Nations, which she's been doing for the past 4 years. Her volunteerism first began in Nepal, where she stayed for over 3 and a half years. Now Carine is stationed in South Sudan. The UN compound where she stays houses about 20 volunteers in different box-like houses, where they sleep, cook, and bathe. I asked her

what her life goals/dreams are, and she replied, "this"; she wants to dedicate her life to working in underserved regions!

Lourdes Alonso is originally from the city of Baybay in the Philippines. She attended nursing school in Manila and worked in a military hospital there for 2 years. For the past 5 years she has also been working for the UN as a volunteer nurse. She began her work in 2007 in the northern part of Sudan, but conflict there forced her team to evacuate, so now she is stationed in South Sudan. Once her contract ends she would like to continue to volunteer with the UN for the next couple of years, but also has dreams of marriage and adopting children of her own one day. She also would like to start a business in the food industry, maybe opening up a restaurant in the Philippines!

On the behalf of ISHI, we'd like to thank them both for all of their dedication and hard work, and we hope to see them both on future ISHI missions!



ISHI volunteer and ER nurse at University Hospital **Stephanie Burroughs** has traveled on two missions with ISHI. 2011 was a busy year for Burroughs who traveled on ISHI's first nurse-driven mission to Guatemala in October. One month later, Burroughs joined the ISHI team on a surgical mission to Kabala in Sierra Leone.

"It is our last day in Kabala and we are packed and getting ready to head back to Freetown. The work has been well worth it. People's lives have been changed. The work ISHI has done will allow the people here to return to work, thereby allowing them to provide for their families. The emergency cases during the mission are all alive and doing well. I do believe in divine intervention. I believe we all were placed here at this particular point in time to provide the necessary treatment and care to the people here in Kabala. **A smile, handshake and expressive eyes can cross any language barrier.** It is my wish that everyone embrace the challenges and reach out to give aid to others. Volunteering yourself, your skills and services is so rewarding and reviving to the spirit."

Stephanie

Taken from ISHI blog, 'Last Day in Kabala'

## Volunteer Highlight Socorro Rogers, OR Nurse



ISHI volunteer Socorro Rogers is an operating room nurse at University Hospital in Newark. She has traveled on surgical missions with ISHI to Guatemala in 2009 and the Philippines in 2011 and 2012. Originally from the Philippines, Rogers has helped plan two surgical missions to the Philippines. She has a passion for volunteerism and says she is proud of her work with ISHI. In 2011, along with fellow OR nurse Mae Tingson, Rogers helped organize the nursing team who would travel to Escalante City and Sagay City for a two week ISHI mission. She was instrumental in recruiting volunteers, gathering supplies, securing donations to support the team and helping Team Leader Tingson with the logistics of taking a team of 20 to rural Philippines. During the mission, Rogers and Tingson helped train young Filipino nurses and nursing students in the OR. ISHI's first mission to Southeast Asia in 2011 was a success and followed by return in 2012 to Dapitan City in Mindanao. Rogers is already planning the third mission to the Philippines which will be in 2013 to the town of Ormoc.

## Breast Cancer Survivor Thankful to ISHI By Marissa Weekes Mason

On February 3, 2011, as people listened to vibrant drumming and watched red dragons maneuver colorful fireworks bursting against an all black sky canvas in the Philippines, Melanie Sabordo had two more reasons to celebrate.

International Surgical Health Initiative (ISHI) had recently traveled to the Southeast Asian region of Negros Occidental on a humanitarian surgical mission where Sabordo, after two years of pain, would go with best friend Estela Khey to a screening by ISHI.

Khey escorted her best friend to the screening, which she gave to Sabordo as a

birthday gift, with her birthday falling on Chinese New Year and only 9 days before ISHI's departure. (continued on page 6)



## **Breast Cancer Survivor** **(Con't)**

ISHI made their first medical mission to Southeast Asia after completing several missions in Guatemala and Haiti.

“It took me almost two years to decide for that operation after I discovered my lump,” said Sabordo. “My friend took me to ISHI as a birthday gift and my cousins sponsor my chemo.”

Sabordo, a 45-year-old secondary school teacher and mother of six, met surgical oncologist and mission volunteer Dr. Kevin Clarke with hesitation.

“I suspect she may have been in denial in terms of not wanting to know the results. I also think she was scared,” said Dr. Kevin Clarke.

Once Sabordo was screened, she waiting anxiously for the results.

“Dr. Clarke came to me and told me it was breast cancer. I was really shocked. The surgery was scheduled the next day and I was really scared of the operation,” said Sabordo.

Sabordo was immediately taken in for surgery and had her left breast removed. She has been receiving chemotherapy cycles since the operation.

Each treatment of chemotherapy is broken up into sessions or cycles that include the time between the start of chemotherapy and the next administration.

“In the first cycle, the patient gets intravenous administration for one week with three weeks off,” said Dr. Clarke.

Currently, Sabordo is on her third cycle and although chemotherapy treatments can often

have side effects including nausea, vomiting and loss of hair, Sabordo is feeling fair these days.

“I am just ok after every session but I still have an appetite. In fact I am gaining weight.”

Dr. Clarke, who keeps in touch with a majority of his patients as an oncologist, chose to keep in touch with Sabordo via email.

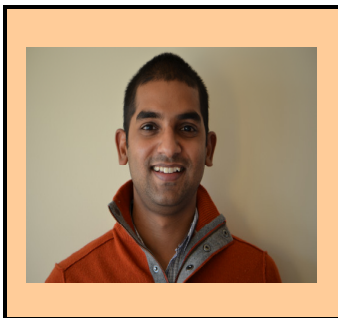
For Dr. Clarke, who is currently a surgical oncologist at Beth Israel Hospital in Northern New Jersey, he expected to do hysterectomy and hernia surgeries on the ISHI mission but the cancer surgery was unexpected.

“It’s nice that we could do cancer surgery. It was nice to be able to do what I’m use to, trying to, enjoy doing, especially in a country where this service may not have been otherwise accessible,” said Dr. Clarke.

Melanie Sabordo remembers telling Dr. Clarke just before her surgery, “I’m afraid I will die and he said, “No, no, no, you will be ok,” “and those words made me feel comfortable. All ISHI members treated us well. They were loving and caring to us Filipinos with no discrimination.”

As Sabordo awaits her fourth session, she is happy that she can still come home in the middle of the day to prepare lunch for her family.

“I am blessed to have the surgical mission available to me. God is very good and after chemo I can still water my plants the next day.”



**“It all came together for me yesterday. We went on a river boat cruise and as we meandered along we viewed shacks spattered along the banks; simple wooden houses with simple people in them waving at us as we went by. These are the people who have been helped but have no resources to have had it done otherwise. “**

**Amrit Rambhajan, MD**

*Excerpt from Blog, Dapitan City, Philippines Mission, February 2012*

## Giving Back Runs in the Family

By Marissa Weekes Mason

It has been said that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

When nurse practitioner Socorro Galano-Rogers of the University of Medicine and Dentistry joined International Surgical Health Initiative (ISHI) as a volunteer, her daughter Ruby Rogers, 20, decided to hold a fundraiser to support the medical mission efforts of the organization.

Ruby and her sisters of Sigma Psi Kappa Sorority, Incorporated, founded in 2009 at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) in Newark, decided that the 47-year-old Hasbro game *Operation*, where the player gets to be the surgeon, would be a unique attraction for supporters.



“My sisters and I put up flyers in school, sent text messages and also advertised on Facebook,” said Rogers. The sorority, whose founding principles include benevolence, scholarship, character and service, raised over one hundred dollars in two days to support the surgical care that ISHI gives. They caught the interest of many professors and other students on campus with a laptop slideshow showing ISHI's work in Haiti, the Caribbean island overwhelmed by an earthquake in January 2010.

“Community service has always been an integral part of our organization. A line out of our creed is ‘May we never forget to love and serve human kind’ and the dedication I've seen out of all the ISHI members I have met, definitely embodies that statement,” said Rogers.

The sorority, which holds two blood drives a semester for the Red Cross and the American Heart Association, was looking to do local philanthropic work, choosing ISHI because they are based in New Jersey but do great work for others globally.

“ISHI's work around the world is honorable and even though the organization is young, they're growing fast and making a great impact,” said Rogers.

ISHI, founded in 2009, has also helped people through surgical care in Guatemala and Southeast Asia where Rogers' mother was born and raised. Galano-Rogers, who is from Leyte, an island South of Cebu in the Philippines, recently traveled to Sagay City and Escalante City where many patients waited for years in hopes that a surgical team would provide them or loved ones with a much needed operation. ISHI fulfilled their commitment of providing free, life-changing surgeries by completing over 100.

When asked what Rogers thought about her mother volunteering in the Philippines, Rogers said, “I think it is really fulfilling for her and it's something she's always wanted to do.”

Though Rogers will not be able to help with the next fundraiser that her sorority plans to hold for ISHI in the fall as they send a group of volunteer nurses to Guatemala, she trusts her sisters will carry on.

“ISHI is a really good organization to support and although I won't have much time in the fall as I focus on senior year and graduation, I will definitely encourage my sisters because I think they enjoyed it a lot.”

Rogers, a chemical engineering student at NJIT, plans to pursue a career in health and safety after graduation.

## ISHI Volunteers Organize First Nurse-Driven Mission to Guatemala

By Marissa Weekes Mason

For emergency room nurse Natalia McTighe, everyone should volunteer.

That would explain why McTighe, who volunteers with International Surgical Health Initiative (ISHI), went on their first nurse-driven mission to Guatemala while five months pregnant.

“I think everyone should give back in some sort of way. At Thanksgiving, I always want to give back by helping at a soup kitchen but never get to do it. So, working with ISHI on medical missions is my way of giving back,” said McTighe who has traveled on a surgical medical mission to Guatemala with ISHI.



When she first traveled to Guatemala in 2009 with the ISH team of surgeons, they worked in a hospital-based environment much different from her recent Guatemala experience where the nurses traveled to their patients via mobile clinic, seeing 300 patients in 3 hours on their first day.

“I was a lot more exhausted on this mission, everything was just non-stop. On my first mission, when we left the OR we were done. On this mission, we worked, went home, ate dinner and began to pack bags with supplies for the next day of work.”

Each day, McTighe traveled to villages in search of patients with a team of six nurses including University Hospital’s Cathy Blaskewicz APN, Stephanie Burroughs RN, Janet Clausen RN, Michele Egarian APN, Jhoselyn Thomas RN and Emma Toussaint RN, along with photographer Nura Quereshi and logistics coordinator Caitlin Blaskewicz.



Partnering with Jungle Medic, a mobile clinic providing free medical and dental care to 137 remote Mayan Indian villages in the Rio Dulce Izabal area, the team, a pregnant McTighe and photographer Nura Quereshi who was also pregnant, traveled a bumpy ride between five villages.

Squeezed between medical supplies collected during their fundraising efforts and donated suitcases that they gave to village women to use as baby cribs, the nurses were disappointed that they couldn’t visit every village possible.

“Since many schools were also on strike, we used the classrooms to set up and treat patients. On our last work day, we were supposed to treat around 700 patients but because of political turmoil were unable to, which was very disappointing to our team.”

Many of the patients met by the ISHI team of nurses were women and children who had not benefited from medical treatment in over two years. While Jungle Medic supervised the medical care, the nurses treated the women mostly for upper respiratory infections, abscesses, abdominal pain, worm infestations, joint pain, anemia and skin rashes, a medical condition the emergency room nurse does not often treat.

“Cathy [nurse practitioner] is better at dermatology than me so I would ask her about using the right medicines for certain rashes I saw. It was a learning experience for me and I am now better at determining what antibiotics or antifungal creams to use for skin conditions.”

The team did not see many of the men in the villages. Although they too care about their (continued on Page 9)



## Nurse Mission to Guatemala (Con't)

health and would have benefited from the ISHI nurse mission, missing a day of harvest was not an option.

“Some of the women tried to explain their husband’s symptoms and wanted us to give medicine to treat them. It was really sad,” said McTighe who handed out antibiotics, anti-fungal creams, dressing supplies and a month’s worth of vitamins to the women patients and their children.

Although McTighe was able to treat the women of the village, it was hard for her to communicate with the K’iche-speaking Mayans and explain to them how and when to take their medicine. So she asked the K’iche translator to explain sun and moon symbols she drew directly on patient’s medicine packages as a time guide for taking their medicine.

“We would also put red nail polish on the mom’s nails and then put that red nail polish on her medicine package so she would be able to separate her medicine from her children’s.”

The ISHI nurse team saw over 1,000 patients from October 2-11, 2011 thanks to their partnership with Jungle Medic but they realize that some patients seen, require

extended health care including a woman McTighe assessed to have congestive heart failure and liver problems.

“I looked over at Cathy [nurse practitioner] who was sitting right next to me and we both knew she would need treatment beyond our stay,” she said concerned.

McTighe is up for the double duty, revealing that once you get your hands in mission work, especially for people who would not otherwise have this care, you never want to stop.

“My mom was concerned about me and the baby for this mission but my husband Shannon, who is a fireman and per diem nurse at Bayonne Medical Center, was very supportive. He cared for our 4-year-old son Aiden who was very excited telling everyone, ‘My mommy is going to Guatemala again to help people.’”

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## ISHI PICNIC June, 2011

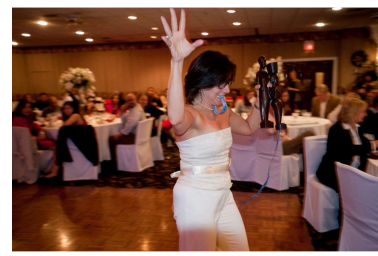
### Celebrating our Volunteers!



# An “Affaire” to Remember!

## December Holiday Celebration

The International Surgical Health Initiative held its annual holiday celebration on Saturday, December 17, 2011 at L’Affaire in Mountainside, New Jersey. This year’s party in addition to celebrating the holiday season, focused on volunteer appreciation. The evening started with a welcome by Dr. Asha Bale, after which Dr. Ziad Sifri, ISHI President, gave a presentation of ISHI’s progress over the last three years. 2011 Missions were then highlighted by three volunteers. First, Dr. Devashish Anjaria gave a slideshow presentation about the Philippines mission to Escalante City and Sagay City, which showed many photos of patients and the surgical team. Next, team leader Jocelyn Thomas RN gave a talk about her team’s mission to the Rio Dulce Valley in Guatemala, where a team of nine nurses evaluated and treated over a thousand Mayan patients. Dr. Benjamin Chandler then gave a very moving presentation about his experience in Sierra Leone. Ben’s team had just returned from Kabala the week before. Sierra Leone being a new location for ISHI, Ben described some of the challenges and accomplishments of the team, while expressing that this experience “changed his life”. Lastly, Mrs. Debbie Livingston spoke about her project in Kabala, which involved painting a mural in the Hospital’s maternity ward, depicting local women in colorful costumes. The evening was concluded by announcing the winners of the raffles and silent auctions, and then presenting certificates of appreciation to all the volunteers. Thank you to everyone who attended and helped make this event a huge success!



### Excerpt from Blog, Sierra Leone Mission, by Dr. Ziad Sifri, President –

“To say that we tried to help everyone, in any way we could, including donating our own blood to a very sick baby, is only part of the story. The intense and incredible mood of giving that the team displayed on a daily basis despite the fatigue was inspirational and contagious. This mission demonstrated that when a group of people come together with the right intentions, love in their hearts and a strong desire to give back, they can overcome all obstacles, beat the odds, and accomplish extraordinary things. They can achieve more together than each one alone. They can push themselves to levels they did not think would be attainable. That was the essence of this mission.... This truly unique experience of giving unconditionally to another fellow human being, matched with the ability to accept help with dignity and sincere appreciation, was very powerful and special.”



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**Ishiglobal.org**

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