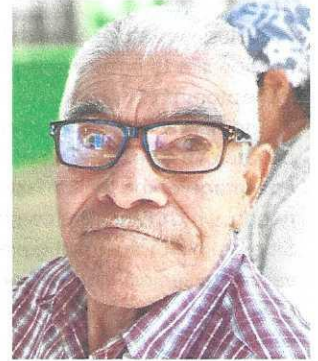


OCS #46

Sitio del Niño, La Libertad, El Salvador
November 23, 2024

Through collaboration with international partners and local entities like the federal government of El Salvador, municipal governments, universities, grassroots organizations, and community leaders, PazSalud continues to serve patients living in poverty by providing Optometry and Cataract Screening (OCS) missions to the most vulnerable senior members of society. An OCS mission provides a rare opportunity for economically marginalized patients to receive an eye exam, prescription glasses, reading glasses, eye lubricating drops, cataract and pterygium screening and as needed, a referral for ophthalmological care in the national healthcare system.



Quick Facts:

What: Optometry and Cataract Screening (OCS) mission focusing on optometry services, eye exams, delivering distance and reading glasses, and screening patients for cataracts and pterygia.

When: Saturday, November 23, 2024 from 7:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Where: Sitio del Niño (town), La Libertad (state), El Salvador.

Who: PazSalud served economically marginalized seniors living in Sitio del Niño.

Team: PazSalud assembled the following team to carry out the OCS:

1. University of Dr. Andrés Bello (UNAB): UNAB is the largest of the two universities that specialize in optometry in El Salvador.
2. National Health Clinic of Sitio del Niño
3. Northwest Lions Eyeglass Recycling Center (LERC): the LERC donates distance and reading glasses essential to carrying out the PazSalud OCS missions.
4. Wisconsin Lions Foundation (WLF) Eyeglass Recycling Center: the WLF donates distance and reading glasses essential to carrying out the PazSalud OCS missions.

Stats:

- 265 low income patients received comprehensive eye exams
- 252 pairs of distance and/or reading eyeglasses prescribed
- 32 patients with cataracts identified and given referrals to Rosales Hospital for possible surgery
- 6 patients with pterygia identified and given referrals to Rosales Hospital for possible surgery
- 74 optometrists from the UNAB

PazSalud ("PeaceHealth" in Spanish) was created in 2000 to share the gifts of the PeaceHealth health system with patients living in poverty in El Salvador. On November 23, 2024 PazSalud conducted its 46th OCS mission providing eye exams and distributing glasses to economically marginalized patients living in Sitio del Niño; a medium size urban suburb of San Juan Opico with a high concentration of elderly poor patients. To carry out the mission, PazSalud partnered with international and national organizations, the largest Salvadoran optometry university, and various national and local healthcare entities and local volunteers to combine resources to serve to those who would otherwise be forced to go without optometry care. PazSalud planned and coordinated the event while providing the diagnostic equipment, the supplies, and overall logistics to carry out the mission. The University used the OCS as a teaching and training event for students to get hands-on, practical experience in treating patients, many of whom received eye care for the first time in their lives. The team examined patients, fit them with the necessary glasses, provided them with eye drops to treat common eye dryness, and educated them on self-eye care and the importance of regular exams as they age. All patients were screened for cataracts and pterygia and when necessary, given a referral to Rosales National Hospital where they will be examined by an ophthalmologist and evaluated for potential cataract surgery at the hospital.



Twice a year the University's optometry team graduates one senior class and brings in another, and this typically happens during our mission cycle. At the mission in Sitio del Niño, over half the optometrists cycled in for their very first OCS mission with PazSalud and we used the event to train them for the 14-15 missions we will do in 2025. So although the team had 74 optometrists, we were operating at half capacity for seeing patients. Despite this, the team was able to see 265 patients and most importantly, properly prepare the new optometrists to deliver the high level of care PazSalud demands while demonstrating the patience and compassion in every consult that is a hallmark of missions. Patients frequently comment on how carefully and lovingly they are treated at a PazSalud mission and although this requires more time, its time well spent.

PazSalud works closely with the national government health clinics in each mission site to ensure that they pre-select the most adequate patients for our optometry missions. Our goal is always to serve the most economically vulnerable seniors in the area who can't afford access to private eye care. PazSalud always encourages the clinics to take advantage of the OCS mission to attend to the patients' other medical needs, which vary from community to community and season to season. In Sitio del Niño, the local government clinic joined us for the day to vaccinate seniors for pneumonia in preparation for the upcoming winter in El Salvador. The clinic rarely has access to the numbers of seniors an OCS can draw so they try to combine forces with us when they can.

PeaceHealth/PazSalud provides the funding, the resources, and the commitment for the OCS missions which in turn provides a framework for our international and local partners and volunteers to step in and enthusiastically do the rest in caring for our patients. Each component is essential to realizing these optometry missions and bringing help to areas where eye care is rarely found.



Patients

An estimated 11% of El Salvador's population is over 60 years of age (720,000 people) and an estimated 40% of these seniors are illiterate (275,000). Approximately 86% of rural El Salvador has no access to any type of eye care. Immigration (voluntary and forced) to the U.S., internal displacement and poverty have eroded El Salvador's traditional familial structure of 3-4 generation households, often leaving the elderly behind to fend for themselves with little or no support network, no earning potential, and few resources. Seniors are often referred to as the 'discarded' and thousands live far below the poverty line, relying on charity to survive.

