

## AMM in action in the Amazon

In a remote rural community, located deep in the heart of Bolivian Amazon, a mother takes her young daughter into a small health clinic run by just one nurse. Her baby has a potentially serious infection in the orbit of her eye which if left untreated, could even be life threatening.

Twenty minutes later the mother walks out with a diagnosis for her daughter from a top UK ophthalmologist and all the appropriate medicines to treat the infection correctly. All at no cost to the family. A few days later the little girl is doing very well and is out of danger. That was three days ago.

To understand how this happened we need to go back a few years to when Andean Medical Mission started their eye emergency training courses.



Having identified unattended trauma as a real cause of blindness in Bolivia, the Andean Medical Mission put together a training course on the management of eye trauma which we translated into Spanish and set out to train 100 village doctors and nurses working in remote isolated towns and villages in northern Bolivia.

Working with ophthalmologists in La Paz who regularly donate medical samples to us and utilizing a donation of magnifiers, torches and instruments, AMM funded by a very generous donation in the form of a grant, set up the first ever training course for eye emergencies in the Bolivian Amazon.

Every doctor and nurse we have trained (over 100 healthcare workers in a geography the size of the UK) is tested for understanding and given the much-needed supply of eye medicines and basic instruments to help them to better manage trauma. The aim of the project is to speed up access to treatment and improve the quality of diagnosis to eliminate avoidable blindness from unattended or poorly attended eye trauma and disease.

What's more we support all village doctors with a 24-hour hotline for telemedicine. Concerned doctors and nurses can message Andean Medical Mission with cases that concern them and ask for our help and opinion in the diagnosis and management of the problem. They can send us photos and a history for any patient with eye problems and we aim to get back to them within an hour with any additional questions that might be helpful and a proper diagnosis and treatment plan. They can then assign the appropriate medicines to resolve the problem themselves or prepare the patient for travel

to an ophthalmologist in one of the larger cities where we can often help with accessing services quickly and at low cost.

More specifically going back to October this year Andean Medical Mission traveled to the village of Nueva Breama. This is a 26-hour drive from Santa Cruz and involves crossing of several rivers, navigating mud roads, and sleeping in the car in the middle of the jungle to get here. In Nueva Breama (as well as several villages along the way), we carried out teaching and saw patients together with the local nurse to help develop a good approach to questioning and practice using the small solar powered ophthalmoscope which we donated as part of the course. After seeing a good number of cases together, we signed off the nurse as having completed the course and exchanged WhatsApp numbers and agreed to stay in regular contact for any eye related matters.

Fast forward to today and our helpline is gaining traction. We receive calls on a weekly and sometimes daily basis and we have helped with many emergency cases saving sight and reducing the burden of blindness and the hardship that being a blind person in the Amazon brings.

Three days ago, we received the call about the little girl with the orbital inflammation and we forwarded the case to a top UK ophthalmologist and medical Director of AMM in the UK. He replied immediately with his thoughts and followed up the next day to see how our patient was getting along. Our directors aren't just great surgeons, they really care.

I am extremely proud of what Andean Medical Mission is building in Bolivia for the people of the lowland Beni area. We still focus on surgery and carried out over 85 cataract operations with some excellent results again this year. However, the focus on preventing blindness by managing trauma, by immunizing against blinding diseases such as measles and rubella, training doctors and nurses to be better at managing eye disease and our work to carry out mass screening for diseases such as glaucoma, is having an effect that is special and impactful for a population who live in a beautiful but very harsh geography with almost no healthcare services other than village health clinics and ourselves.

We are looking forward to 2024 with anticipation. In doing even more to reduce blindness and chasing excellence in what we already do. If you would like to support us, we would love to have your support. Even small amounts add up and make a big difference over time. The cost of saving this little girl's Christmas in the example above was all in all just a few pounds.

<https://www.justgiving.com/andeanmedicalmission>

Thank you once again and have a happy new year from all of us here at Andean Medical Mission.

Warm regards



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