🌿 Manchichi Movements: Saving Lives in the Mountains

Vocational Visit #3 – August 17–24, 2005

The trails were long—sometimes two hours of hiking after hours of driving—but at the end of each path, we found what we came for: mothers, babies, and the community midwives now being trained as Manchichi Health Navigators.

In villages without electricity, internet, or even phone service, these women are becoming the first line of care. They are learning to measure blood pressure, listen for fetal heartbeats, detect danger signs, and—most importantly—act quickly.

PHOTO: Remote mountain village landscape

PHOTO: Midwife Enedelsy presenting referral form at San Félix Hospital

Early in the trip, Enedelsy Méndez, a trainee from Lajero Abajo, accompanied a young woman with signs of pre-eclampsia and a baby in transverse position to San Félix Hospital. With confidence, she handed over a referral form she had completed herself. The patient was transferred to Obaldía Women's Hospital in David for an emergency cesarean. Two days later, the baby was born healthy. Both mother and child survived.

In Kuerima and Cerro Puerco, trainees demonstrated prenatal exams with quiet determination. They carefully recorded weights, blood pressures, and fetal positions, while young assistants watched and learned. Several mothers were identified as high-risk and referred immediately, lives that might otherwise have been lost.

PHOTO: Trainees in Kuerima and Cerro Puerco conducting prenatal exams

In Cerro Ceniza, Dr. Christopher Rittmeyer performed a thorough pediatric exam on a 7-day-old infant, showing trainees how to listen, observe, and touch with care. The scene captured the essence of this program: knowledge shared, trust built, futures protected.

PHOTO: Dr. Christopher Rittmeyer demonstrating newborn exam in Cerro Ceniza

At the Obaldía Materno-Infantil Hospital in David, Dr. Miriam Rittmeyer presented the Manchichi program to a packed auditorium of doctors and nurses. Head of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department, Dr. Ricardo Burgos praised the efforts

PHOTO: Dr. Burgos, OBGYN Head Department presenting a certificate to Dr. Miriam Rittmeyer

PHOTO: Audience of hospital staff at Grand Rounds presentation

The journey closed with an invitation to present Manchichi at the National Ministry of Health in Panama City. Discussions have already begun on integrating this model into the national system.

PHOTO: Ministry of Health meeting in Panama City

"We will finally be receiving patients earlier, with information, and with time to act" Dr. Burgos Director Obaldía Materno-Infantil Hospital in David

Meanwhile, training continues every week in the mountains, and we will soon go to evaluate the program in the Coastal communities of Kusapín, in collaboration with Floating Doctors.

For the mothers in these remote villages, every pregnancy carries risk. But with Manchichi, midwives are no longer alone. They are trained, connected, and supported. And as this trip proved again and again:

- 💜 Lives are being saved.
- 💜 Communities are empowered.
- 💜 The future looks different now.

Manchichi: Care Navigation that Saves Lives