Manchichi Movements

CLUB ROTARIO DE BOQUETE - Vocational Visit #3 part 2, Coastal communities– Sept 15-17, 2025

Following the highly successful vocational visit to the Mountain communities in August, a second training assessment visit was scheduled—this time targeting the six coastal communities of the Kusapín District. The purpose once again was to evaluate how the *Manchichi* midwives-in-training—our Health Navigators—were applying their skills in some of the most remote corners of Panama, and to witness firsthand the life-saving impact of their work.

Boat travel across unpredictable open seas adds a serious challenge for expectant mothers, underscoring the critical importance of having competent prenatal care available within their communities. For more than three months, the midwives and traditional doctors have been actively using their medical kits during continuous training and were eager to showcase their new abilities. The three health promoter–trainers excelled in preparing their students, organizing patient schedules, and ensuring a smooth flow of screenings throughout the three-day evaluation. The evaluation team was composed of:

- **Tatiana Blanco**, a health professional from Cartagena, on her sixth visit to the Comarca during her four years of collaboration with Phalarope and the *Manchichi* program.
- **Patricia Mendoza**, a trainer with four years of experience and local supervisor of the trainers, who provided on-the-ground support and translation.
- **Dr. David Borge**, an OB/GYN from San Francisco with extensive international experience—having attended over 10,000 births across eight countries. Dr. Borge is a member of the San Rafael, CA Rotary Club, a longtime volunteer with Floating Doctors, and currently serves on the advisory board of Phalarope.
- **Rylie Tiffin, a Peace Corps volunteer who is spending her volunteer time in Cerro Otoe and joine us on this trip as she has been a witness of the work our certified midwives and healers during the Manchichi 1 are doing**

On Monday, September 15, the team traveled by boat to the community of San Lorenzo, where Health Promoter **Dayrinia Córdoba** had assembled her trainees, their assistants, and patients from Playa Lorenzo and the nearby village of Bucori. The training took place in the home of one of the midwives, Marta, who hosted the group. After

introductions, the midwives paired up to demonstrate their ability to conduct comprehensive patient evaluations, reflecting the progress achieved through the program.

Playa Lorenzo

One of the midwives, **Marcella**, is not only a skilled birth attendant but also the proud grandmother of Health Promoter **Dayrinia Córdoba**. Their partnership beautifully illustrates how traditional knowledge is being passed from one generation to the next, blending ancestral wisdom with modern training. During this visit, two patients were evaluated: a 39-year-old mother in late-stage pregnancy (34 weeks) and a postpartum mother with her 3-week-old baby. All vital signs confirmed that both mothers and the newborn were in good health.

The continuity of care provided by Marcella, Dayrinia, and their fellow midwives underscores the resilience of these communities: every mother and baby receives ongoing weekly visits, ensuring that no family is left behind. This intergenerational model not only saves lives but also strengthens trust, cultural identity, and the sustainability of maternal care in the most remote areas of Panama.

RN Tatiana Blanco y Dayrinia

Ensenada

On Day 2, all three trainers accompanied us to **Ensenada** to continue the assessments. Midwives and one traditional *médico* from both Ensenada and Punta Valiente—communities under the guidance of trainer **Nancy Nap**—gathered for the session, joined by three patients (two expectant mothers and one postpartum mother with her young baby). Once again, we were impressed by the methodical and professional manner in which the midwives and the traditional healer collaborated, carefully documenting each patient's history and conducting comprehensive evaluations.

At the same time, the **Floating Doctors** volunteer team was holding a community clinic in Ensenada. A long line of patients from surrounding villages had assembled, seeking consultations with the visiting medical staff. In the afternoon, we met with **Dr. Mariela Kolk**, a medical professional from the Netherlands who has been serving as a mentor and liaison for the three trainers. Although she was unable to join us during the patient assessments on this visit, she has done so in the past, contributing valuable insights and instruction. Her continued involvement strengthens the mentorship framework that supports the trainers as they refine their teaching and supervisory roles. This parallel effort highlighted both the tremendous need for healthcare in the region and the complementary role of the *Manchichi* program in extending care into areas where conventional health services remain scarce.

Dr. David Borge, a Rotarian from the San Rafael Harbor Rotary Club and member of Phalarope's Technical Advisory Board, is demonstrating patient evaluations

Dr. Mariela Kolk (Floating Doctors)

On the third and final day, we gathered in Playa Verde to observe the midwives and traditional doctors—students of Hermelinda Flores-Smith—examine a total of four patients. The three midwives, two assistants, and two traditional healers had already organized a table with all necessary equipment prepared to demonstrate their diagnostic skills. In under three hours, a record time, the four patients (including one young baby) had been thoroughly interviewed and examined.

As with the previous two sessions, the team of Health Navigators carried out professional and competent evaluations. The input provided by medical professionals Dr. David Borge and Tatiana Blanco was highly positive, reinforcing key concepts and validating the progress of the trainees. Overall, it was an impressive demonstration of the effectiveness of this training program.

Unfortunately, the Health Coordinator, Licdo. Jiménez, from the nearby (a very relative term) MINSA Kusapín Clinic, was unable to attend the demonstrations. However, he has expressed strong interest in the program and pledged both to visit the communities during future training sessions and to receive patient referrals.

Playa Verde

Only a few minor health concerns were identified during this visit (such as anemia and weight management issues). What was most striking, however, was the clear dedication of the *health navigators*—engaged, motivated, and vigilant in their mission to provide consistent and competent patient monitoring. Their ability to detect health concerns early is critical; advanced recognition of serious conditions will save lives in these medically isolated communities.

These encounters highlighted one of the *Manchichi* program's most powerful contributions: bridging worlds of care by fostering respectful collaboration among midwives, traditional healers, and biomedical practitioners. This parallel effort highlights both the tremendous need for healthcare in the region and the complementary role of the *Manchichi* program in extending care into areas where conventional health services remain scarce. This integrated approach not only saves lives but also nurtures a culture of trust, making healthcare more accessible in Panama's most remote communities.

The Rotary Club of Boquete is proud to sponsor such a vital and successful program in partnership with its long-standing collaborator, Phalarope. With three months of training still ahead, the health navigators will soon undergo rigorous evaluations to test the knowledge and skills they have acquired. We are confident that most—if not all—will succeed and receive their certificates of achievement, becoming certified leaders of maternal and community health in their regions.