

NEWS PEACE

The First Lesson of So Many

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In 2013, I had recently qualified as a general urologist, and I heard about some volunteers from Physicians for Peace, specialists in reconstructive urologic surgery, who were coming to conduct a urethral surgery training workshop to be held in Moca, a rural area in the interior of our island. With time available and a desire to learn, I headed there, not knowing I would meet two of the most altruistic people I have ever known, Dr. Ramón Virasoro and Dr. Jessica DeLong. They possess the ability to give without expecting anything in return, just because it is the right thing to do. It was the first lesson of so many they taught me.

It was their first visit to the Dominican Republic, but it would not be the last. Since then, they have kept coming at least twice a year. Just spending a few minutes with them was enough for me to know they would become my role models.

Two years later, due to the personal interest of these doctors and the Physicians for Peace organization in raising the quality of urologic service in our country, the idea emerged to create a fellowship in reconstructive genitourinary surgery. And before I knew it, it had been approved, and thanks to God, they had given me the most important opportunity of my life.

On July 2, 2016, while I was flying to Norfolk full of fear and doubts, I had already taken the first step. There was no going back. I spent a month there where I saw my dear teachers in their everyday life, both at work and with their families. After this observational rotation, I would never see the practice of medicine in the same way again. In the hospital my eyes would open wide seeing so many things that I had only read about before, in addition to seeing and making rotations with two renowned reconstructive surgeons.

My time in Virginia was enhanced over the next five months with intensive hands-on training rotations in Santiago, Chile, with Dr. Reynaldo Gomez and in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with Drs. Carlos Giudice and Leandro Capiel. Once back in the Dominican Republic, I was anxious to apply what I'd learned and continued training in pelvic floor and functional urology, which I would pursue until the end of the year with Dr. Merycarla Pichardo.



L-R Dr. Virasoro, Dr. Ledesma & Dr. DeLong

*Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much"*

— Helen Keller

Once my training was complete, the most difficult thing was to face highly complex surgeries without my teachers at my side. But trusting in what I'd learned and determined to help the patients, I began to feel more and more comfortable every time.

After spending five or six hours in one of these surgeries and the time comes to remove the patient's catheter, I am so privileged to witness the expression on the faces of the patients, many times accompanied by tears falling from their eyes, a sign that expresses the joy they feel to return to normal function. This is a moment of joy for me as well, confirming that it has been worth the sacrifice and commitment of my teachers and the generosity from Physicians for Peace supporters.

Urologic medical injuries are challenging for my patients, and the surgeries required to treat them are very challenging as well. Thanks to the vision and determination of Physicians for Peace, some Dominican organizations, and altruistic people like Drs. Virasoro and DeLong, we can now do these life-changing procedures regularly, benefiting so many Dominicans and Caribbeans who otherwise would perhaps be condemned to stigma and exclusion.

I carry the PFP slogan, "Teach One, Heal Many," in my heart. Now I can also share my knowledge, experiences, and everything I've learned with my Dominican colleagues.

ON BEHALF OF ALL DOMINICANS, THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY!



Dr. Wellington Ledesma reassuring his patient prior to surgery while being supported by Dr. DeLong



Dr. Ledesma proudly displaying his fellowship diploma from PFP



Dr. Nadal, IME Dr. Ramón Virasoro, IME Dr. Leandro Capiel, Dr. Wellington Ledesma, IME Dr. Jessica DeLong and Jamie Morgan, PFP CEO