In May Moran conducted its third mission to the central Guatemalan region of Baja Verapaz—where 800,000 people are served by a single ophthalmologist. Working with local partners, the team screened patients in surrounding villages and restored sight to 206 Guatemalans, all while continuing to train the local clinic staff.

**SUMMARY**

There are 242 ophthalmologists in Guatemala, but as is common in developing countries, most live in the countries’ largest cities, leaving few (if any) options for medical care in rural areas like Baja Verapaz, where only one ophthalmologist (Dr. Orlando Gonzalez) must serve 800,000 citizens.

An estimated 80,000 Guatemalans are blind from cataracts and thousands more children, women and men go blind every year or are functionally blind due to lack of access to eyeglasses.

Guatemala is one of Central America’s poorest and most populous countries. With nearly 75% of its 15 million people living below the poverty line, nearly 37% live on less than $2 a day and roughly 15% of people lack access to health care.

The Moran Eye Center first traveled to Guatemala in August 2014, working with the only place for eye care in the region, the Salamá Lions Club’s Eye Hospital. On each trip, in addition to holding a large surgical outreach camp, Moran mentors work to advance Dr. Gonzalez’ surgical skills, training him to use donated equipment and his surgical teams to support him in the operating room (OR). Other team members train his administrative staff in more advanced clinic management and inventory.

**Site:** Salamá, Guatemala

**Partners:** Salamá Lions Club Eye Hospital

**Medical Team:** 5 surgeons (Hari Bodhireddy, Alan Crandall, Roger Furlong, Paul Joos, and Susan MacDonald), 4 Nurses (Jennifer Benson, Cathy Spillman, Lisa Williamson, Desnee Joos), 3 technicians (Abraham Granados III, Holly Kersich, Abbey Schwab) Also present: 3 public health researchers:, Adam Butler, Denise Morgan, and Bill Self.

**Donor/Volunteers** Fred and Christine Fairclough, Desnee and Paul Joos, Heidi Furlong, Talus James, Austin Williamson, Robin Mulkern, Abbott Medical Optics Inc., Alcon, Allergan, Inc. Dub Scrubs, IOP Ophthalmics, MicroSurgical Technologies, Oertli Instruments AG, Rocky Mountain Eye Center (Montana), SEE International.

**Patient Impact:** 206 sight-restoring surgeries: 182 cataracts, 24 pterygium

**Partner Training:** Dr. Orlando Gonzalez in surgery, clinical staff in OR management, inventory, and patient processing
Screening and preparation

On May 20th, an advance team of 8 arrived in Guatemala and traveled to the remote villages of Rabinal, Santa Cruz de Alta Verapaz, and Morazán to various recruit and pre-screen patients who would be good candidates for surgery. The remainder of the team arrived in Salamá on May 24th, and worked diligently to prepare the tiny operating room (OR) at the Lions Club Eye Hospital for a high-volume week of sight-restoring surgery. Notably, two additional operating beds were added to the OR, allowing the team to run three surgeries simultaneously throughout the outreach camp.

A non-stop clinic

Each day there were long lines and a packed clinic, and the Moran and local hospital teams worked side-by-side. From registering patients, to helping them wash their hands and faces to prepare for surgery, to removing the actual cataracts, and giving post-operative instructions in Spanish, the Moran team never stopped moving.

By the end of the week, the team completed 206 eye surgeries. Children that were held back from school to care for a blind parent could now return to school, adults could return to work. The clinic became a place of joyful tears as 200 families experienced new freedom.

Ongoing commitment

In 2014, Moran committed to spending at least five years transforming the eye care capacity of this region, and that work continues. The next trip to Guatemala is planned for the Spring of 2016.

Zoila, 77: “I can see everything!”

77-year-old Zoila Amimta Rodriguez had been completely blind for six years. When her eye patch was removed after surgery, tears of joy and disbelief trickled down her face. She grabbed a physician’s shirt and simply stated, “Your shirt is blue.” She grabbed another—“your shirt is white.” Still in shock, she looked up at the sky and exclaimed, “I can see colors! I can see everything! I have seen only darkness for six years!” Zoila’s husband also received sight-restoring surgery that same day, and for the first time in years, they were able to walk home together, hand-in-hand.