

Acupuncture in Guatemala

VOLUNTEERS WANTED TO PROVIDE CARE AND TRAINING

Editorial Staff

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, more than 100,000 people were killed in Guatemala due to civil unrest. As a result, thousands of Guatemalan refugees have been forced to relocate to the northern part of the country, settling in small communities that suffer from a lack of basic nutrition and health care.

For the past five years, the Guatemala Acupuncture and Medical Aid Project (GUAMAP), a non-profit organization based in Tucson, Arizona, has undertaken the Herculean task of helping these refugees. Although the lives of hundreds of people have been improved through their efforts, much work still needs to be done. Toward that end, the project is seeking five to 10 acupuncturists to volunteer their time and work in northern Guatemala in January and February, late spring, and September 2001.

"Guatemala is not a quiet, sleepy little country," said GUAMAP president Blake Gentry, who along with his wife started working with Central American refugees in the 1980s. "We're not sending them into (conflict) areas, but anyone who knows anything about Guatemala knows it is not a passive country."

The project has been sending pairs of board-certified acupuncturists to Guatemala since 1995. Acupuncturists in the project train local health promoters (promotores de salud) and midwives (comadronas) that have previously been trained in preventive medicine and first aid procedures by local health organizations. The promoters and midwives then use the skills they learn from the acupuncturists to treat patients in their communities.

To date, some 64 health promoters and seven midwives have been trained in basic acupuncture concepts through GUAMAP. The project has also established two training protocols for basic and intermediate students; four health promoters have already completed the intermediate level.

In addition to providing basic training, the acupuncturists spend at least four weeks treating patients in the northern regions of Peten and Alta Verapaz. Among the most common conditions seen are low back pain, neck pain, shoulder pain, asthma, headaches, joint pain, sinusitis, dysentery and malaria.

Acupuncturists interested in volunteering their time to the project must meet specific criteria in order to serve in Guatemala. Volunteers must:

- Be NCCAOM certified (or equivalent);
- Have been in practice a minimum of one year after graduation;
- Have experience teaching acupuncture;
- Be able to speak Spanish sufficiently to teach acupuncture;
- Have some basic knowledge of Guatemala; and
- Be able to contribute toward travel expenses to and from Guatemala City.

Acupuncturists are also encouraged to donate supplies, herbal products, acupuncture needles,

pharmaceutical medicines and other equipment. For more information, contact the Guatemala Acupuncture and Medical Aid Project at:

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