

PRH's chief of cardiology, Mark Jacobs, MD, FACC, recently traveled to Viedma Hospital in Cochabamba, Bolivia.



DOCTOR IN DEMAND

PRH cardiologist brings pacemakers to Bolivia, reconnects with his passion

It was noon when Mark Jacobs, MD, FACC, arrived at Viedma Hospital in Cochabamba, Bolivia. At the door was an endless line of patients, many of whom had traveled long distances to be seen. Taken aback but invigorated, he was at work providing care by 1 p.m.

DELIVERING HEART CARE

Chief of Cardiology at PRH, Dr. Jacobs traveled to Bolivia last fall as part of a medical team sponsored by Project Pacer International, a nonprofit group that provides cardiac services to needy individuals in the developing world.

Dr. Jacobs' focus was pacemakers. He evaluated more than 50 individuals and implanted pacemaker devices in 20 of them. The Project Pacer team, which included 18 physicians, nurses and technicians, also performed open-heart surgery, implanted

cardiac defibrillators and provided medical treatments.

Patients flocked to the team, often planning for the visit weeks in advance. Bolivian physicians referred many of the patients, and the event was publicized in newspapers and via broadcast media. "The staff at the hospital was very helpful and appreciative," Dr. Jacobs says.

THE YOUNG AT RISK

Unlike American cardiac patients who are generally older, heart disease patients in Bolivia can be as young as 30. A common parasitic disease in South America called Chagas disease can lead to cardiac arrhythmias, enlarged hearts and congestive heart failure.

"It was striking to see young men walking around with heart rates of 30 beats per minute—they should have been between 60 and 100," Dr. Jacobs says. Chagas disease often

infects children, although it may take time for serious consequences to emerge.

A HUMBLING EXPERIENCE

Dr. Jacobs makes a point of mentioning the generous support he received from PRH President and CEO Bill Schuler; from members of the cardiac catheterization laboratory; and from his practice, Atlantic Cardiology Associates.

He says it was memorable and humbling to be working in a hospital considered modern by third-world standards but still reliant on materials considered unusable in the United States, such as worn cloth gowns and surgical sheets.

"It was one of the best experiences I've had in my life," he says. "It reminded me of why I went into medicine—no paperwork or insurance issues, just treating and helping patients." ❏



Many Bolivian patients travel great distances for medical care.

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