



BY RICK MUNDY

Dr. Laura Keuny (Georgetown ophthalmology resident), Dr. Jordana Fein of The Retina Group of Washington, Dr. Melissa Kern (pediatric ophthalmologist) in one of the operating rooms after a full day of surgery



Dr. Jordana Fein of The Retina Group of Washington



L to R: Operating room nurse, 6-year-old patient (Cristian) with white cataract left eye about to go into the operating room, Dr. Jordana Fein of The Retina Group of Washington

# "Coolest thing I've ever done"

(OTHER THAN HAVING HER CHILDREN)

Dr. Jordana Fein of the Retina Group of Washington loves giving back. So when the opportunity came for her to travel with the Virginia Hospital Center's Medical Brigade to Honduras she jumped at the chance. The Medical Brigade was started some 15 years ago after Hurricane Mitch, and has worked to improve living conditions in developing countries, everything from installing clean water systems to medical procedures for low-income residents.

"This is something I have wanted to do for a long time," says Dr. Fein. "A surgery that is generally considered no big deal in our country is a very big deal in Honduras. I was the first-ever cataract surgeon in the Brigade and was able to make a huge difference for the patients we saw."

Preparing for the trip was not a simple matter. Getting materials was a complicated process, but caring organizations stepped up. Alcon, a leading eye care manufacturer donated supplies and also loaned an ultrasound machine. The Lions Eye Club loaned a Zeiss microscope.

## In the week

The "hospital" is a facility run by monks which is open for missionary trips like this. Generally patients travel long distances on foot to be considered for the available procedures. In addition to Dr. Fein there was a pediatric ophthalmologist, a urologist, and an OB-GYN doctor that worked in the four operating rooms. Several nurses and other volunteers assisted with the operation.

In that one November week, they saw 100 patients. Everything is free to the patients who must be low income to qualify. On Sunday everyone was screened and surgeries and post-op visits were performed Monday through Friday.



Dr. Jordana Fein of The Retina Group of Washington (left) and others accompany patient Jose Maldonado after cataract surgery

"We only operated on those who were basically blind so it was a life-altering experience for most patients," explained Fein. "Because of a finite supply of lenses (also generously donated by Alcon) we would frequently have to use a lens which was not a perfect solution (as one would expect in the U.S.) This "good enough" approach was perfectly acceptable to the patients because these procedures allowed them to see again, which translates to higher-functioning people with an increased ability to work."

"The entire week was really rewarding for me. We were able to have a huge impact in just a short visit. I was further inspired by the wonderful people I traveled with. Everyone came together, working for the same common goal of giving to others. Every traveler paid \$600 for the trip which covered their flight, the accommodations, and the food."

"And the patients! In spite of long walks and long waits, they were all very patient and we heard no complaints. They were so appreciative and kind. Although we tried to explain risks and benefits as required in the U.S., their comments were more on the lines of "If you say I should do this, then I'll do it." Their gratitude was unbelievable. There were



Dr. Melissa Kern (pediatric ophthalmologist) and Dr. Laura Keuny (Georgetown ophthalmology resident) performing strabismus surgery

some that we were unable to help. Even they were appreciative of doing whatever we could or just for trying to help.

“There was a reason I went to medical school in the first place—to help others. This experience really brought back the positive feelings associated with making a difference in others’ lives.”

In fact, the Retina Group of Washington where Dr. Fein practices also believes in being good members of the community. As the region’s largest provider of retinal and macular care, the group encourages their team to support the communities in which they live and work. For Dr. Fein that includes staffing senior Georgetown residents at the Lions Eye Club’s free clinic at the Woodburn Surgical Center. She also supervises one or two clinics a month at Washington Hospital Center.

But what about Virginia Hospital Center’s Medical Brigade? Is she likely to go back again? Dr. Fein replied, “As I was leaving I was already saying, ‘I have to go back.’”

The Retina Group of Washington offers diagnosis and treatment of the full range of retinal & macular diseases, and conducts cutting-edge clinical research trials. RGW has seven locations in Northern Virginia—Fairfax and Manassas where Dr. Fein works—as well as Tysons, Sterling, Alexandria, Woodbridge, and Fredericksburg. There are 15 locations around the greater D.C. area. ❖



Post-operative cataract patients the day following surgery waiting for post-operative check and patch removal