



HONOUR TO HELP Burnaby Hospital RN Kathy Bonitz is proud of her team's work in Ecuador.

KATHY BONITZ

Canadian Association Of Medical Teams Abroad

Assisting Ecuador's Poor

KATHY BONITZ WAS STUNNED when she arrived at Ecuador's Quito International Airport last February. Passing through arrivals, the Burnaby Hospital OR nurse found herself being greeted with a hero's welcome. It was her second visit to the city, and she soon realized that the people cheering were patients she had nursed a year earlier.

"It was so emotional, I felt like a rock star," she says of the experience.

Bonitz was participating in the Canadian Association of Medical Teams Abroad (CAMTA) 2014 mission to the South American country.

CAMTA was formed in 2001 by a small group of Edmonton-based healthcare practitioners and lay people who had been on previous medical missions to Ecuador to provide orthopaedic surgery to pediatric and adult patients and to provide continuing education on detection and treatment practices for medical personnel in Ecuador.

Around the world, one in every 1000 babies is born with a club foot. In Ecuador, the majority of these children are not treated at birth, making learning to walk difficult or impossible. Ecuador also has

a high incidence of hip dysplasia, a birth defect which can cripple a person by age 30. Poverty and limited access to medical assistance often means children with these conditions live with pain and limited mobility their entire lives.

CAMTA returned to Ecuador last February and March for the thirteenth year in a row. Two separate teams, numbering close to 100 people in total, stayed for a total of 17 days. The goal: perform 44 hip replacements on 35 adults, and 35 surgeries on 27 children.

Bonitz says her positive experience last year inspired her to participate again. Team members volunteer their time and expertise and raise the funds necessary to cover their travel and living expenses. Everything that they raise above that amount helps to pay for medical and surgical supplies and equipment needed for the mission.

"I do baking at work and my partner donates a percentage of his art sales," says Bonitz. "Almost all the money goes to the mission as there isn't a lot of administrative overhead."

This year, Bonitz was part of the second cohort volunteering from February 22 to March 4. "I was on the adult OR team – we do total hip surgeries on adults, and then there's a pediatric OR team that does assorted things to do with club feet and congenital hip deformities."

Bonitz is clearly proud of her team's work and how profoundly it affects their patients. "They were even doing bilateral hip replacements on some of them – and I've never seen that in Canada before – and they were up walking around the next day," she says. "They



HEALING WORK Dr. Marc Moreau cares for a young patient. In Ecuador, the majority of children born with club feet are not treated at birth, making learning to walk difficult or impossible.

had post-op pain, but it was so much less than they'd been having with their conditions that brought them to us – it was just phenomenal."

Bonitz strongly encourages other BCNU members to consider participating in a CAMTA mission. "It's an incredible experience to be able to share our nursing skills and knowledge and it also reaffirms for me how important our healthcare system is, which Canadians just take for granted," she says.

"Most of the people there, they just wouldn't be able to afford it and they are stuck living with such pain and immobility." **UPDATE**



ON A MISSION RN Tracey Rice unpacks medical supplies brought to Ecuador in hockey bags during this year's Canadian Association of Medical Teams Abroad 2014.