

Carolinas HealthCare System: Transforming healthcare delivery around the world



Quick EVP Facts:

Company: Carolinas HealthCare System

HQ: Charlotte, North Carolina

Employees: 60,000 +

Corporate assets deployed in featured program:

Physicians, technicians, nurses, hospital administrators and medical equipment

Engagement model: Loaned employee model

Types of skills: Medical and healthcare expertise

Geography: Featured program is global

In Belize, often surgery candidates like 74-year-old Emir Alfaro have few options for treating heart disease. There are only eight doctors for every 10,000 people, compared with 24 doctors for every 10,000 people in the United States. Alfaro was diagnosed with blocked arteries in 2004 but could not travel for surgery. In July 2012, his life changed when he became the first open-heart surgery patient in Belize. This was thanks to the help of healthcare providers volunteering with the International Medical Outreach (IMO) Program, developed in partnership with Carolinas HealthCare System and the Heineman Foundation of Charlotte.

"It means a lot to me, because now, I feel like I'm free," said Alfaro. "I thank the doctors from Charlotte and everyone who helped make this happen because without them, I probably would not be alive."

For more than six years, the IMO Program has helped transform the delivery of healthcare around the world, from Belize and Guatemala to Kenya and Tanzania. The program helps to create sustainable healthcare systems in underserved communities by offering free training to international caregivers and donating equipment and supplies to hospitals in need.

A pride-filled moment for the program came about in 2014, when the First Lady of Guatemala, Rosa María Leal de Pérez, joined a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of an echocardiography laboratory (echo lab) in a regional hospital in Zacapa, Guatemala. The hospital is one of 13 in Central America that IMO is equipping with echo labs. The program donates echocardiography machines to hospitals and helps train technicians to operate them and work with cardiologists to identify patients with heart ailments. Echocardiography machines are one of the most basic tools to diagnose heart problems, but the equipment is not readily available to patients in rural areas in Central America.

“The echo labs provide access to healthcare for thousands of patients, bring cardiac diagnosis into the modern age for millions and facilitate the delivery of life-saving cardiac services at very low or no cost,” said Francis Robicsek, MD, PhD, vice president of the IMO program, who was [awarded by Guatemala’s First Lady in May 2014](#) for his work. “We look forward to continuing our mission to develop sustainable cardiac care in Central America, promoting quality care and healthier communities.”

Dr. Robicsek, who founded the Heineman Foundation in the 1960s, also helped build Guatemala’s premier cardiac care institute [UNICAR](#), which turned 25 in 2014. Medical teams at UNICAR perform more than 800 heart operations each year and serve patients across Guatemala and from neighboring Honduras, Belize and Nicaragua.

“Everyone wants to give back”



Paul Jellum (second from left), a cardiovascular specialist with Carolinas HealthCare System, volunteers in Belize to train healthcare workers in cardiac care.

In 2008, Carolinas HealthCare System partnered with the Heineman Foundation in Charlotte, North Carolina to provide skills-based volunteering opportunities around the world through the IMO Program. The partnership has grown and features equipment donations, medical training and cross-cultural exchanges, in addition to skills-based volunteering. Currently, the program sends volunteer physicians, technicians, nurses and hospital administrators to partner hospitals and clinics in more than 30 countries for assignments that range from three to seven days. Since its beginning, the goal of the program has been to build the capacity of local communities to provide their own healthcare, in particular cardiac care.

Employees at Carolinas HealthCare System who participate in the IMO Program have a transformational experience through their volunteer assignment and often go back for repeat visits. Paul Jellum, a cardiovascular specialist who travelled to Belize over the course of almost two years to help train staff at a cardiac catheterization laboratory (cath lab), said his goal was to make staff in the lab self-sufficient. “I got hooked on the experience. I’ve seen the change occur with my own eyes,” he said.

“Everyone wants to give back,” said Theresa Johnson, Director of the IMO Program and the Heineman Foundation. “There’s a chip in each one of us that says, ‘I want to give back and do more in this life.’ There is a lot of pride and ownership that volunteers take when they start these projects with us.”

Success Factors

In 2014, Carolinas HealthCare System employees contributed nearly 60,000 hours of volunteer service to community nonprofits. This includes volunteers who travel abroad through the IMO Program, as well as those who support local programs including playground builds, tree-planting, mentoring, over-the-counter medication distribution for low-income adults and Heart of a Champion, a program where physicians and employee volunteers provide heart health screenings for high school athletes.

An important part of the success of Carolinas HealthCare System’s volunteer programs is due to the **Community Benefits Council structure**. More than 160 people serve on this council, which represents all parts of the organization. Members implement organization-wide strategic community service projects which offer a wide variety of opportunities and locations so employees can choose projects that best align with their skills, talents and interests. Council members also coordinate an annual community giving campaign which supports United Way, Children’s Miracle Network and local arts councils.

“These partner organizations collectively reach and impact a large number of our patients, families and employees in the communities we serve,” said Lois Ingham, director of Corporate Community Benefit at Carolinas HealthCare System. “We are proud to support them through financial contributions as well as community service.”

Employee recognition is also an important success factor. National studies indicate that volunteering and charitable giving reduce stress and favorably impact health. At Carolinas HealthCare System, teammates who volunteer at least eight hours a year receive \$100 off their LiveWELL employee health insurance premium. The company also recognizes volunteers with monthly Community Benefit awards and gathers winners at an annual Community Benefit Award event celebrating their accomplishments.



“I was speechless when I learned I was nominated for [an] award. I do this because I love what I do. It’s exciting to know I’m helping others learn to better care for their patients in their hospitals and communities.” -- Paul Jellum, Carolinas HealthCare System

In fact, in 2014, Jellum was recognized with a Community Benefit Award, based on his outstanding volunteerism and commitment to international medical outreach, in addition to being nominated for a Pinnacle Award—the highest award given to Carolinas HealthCare System teammates. “I was speechless when I learned I was nominated for these awards,” Jellum said. “I do this because I love what I do. It’s exciting to know I’m helping others learn to better care for their patients in their hospitals and communities.”

The strength of the IMO program is due to the **long lasting partnership with the Heineman Foundation**.

“Carolinas HealthCare System and Heineman have been working collaboratively for decades,” Johnson said. “Through continued equipment donations and volunteers from Carolinas HealthCare and strategic placement planning from Heineman, IMO is expanding the scope of medical services offered abroad, including primary care, intensive care and women’s health.”

The Impact

Because the Corporate Community Benefit department coordinates Carolinas HealthCare System's community engagement programs, they align these programs with corporate strategy. Harnessing their core competencies as a healthcare company, they prioritize their community work around improving the quality of healthcare in communities and make sure a majority of employees’ service projects are healthcare-related. All of the projects are linked either to an identified community health priority or to a social determinant of health. **Employee volunteerism also impacts employee engagement and pride**, as evidenced through the teammate engagement survey question: “Do you believe Carolinas HealthCare System makes worthwhile contributions in the community?” Scores for this question are consistently high, and exceed national benchmarks.

“Through IMO, our volunteers continually demonstrate employee satisfaction,” Johnson said. “This is especially true during missions abroad where they see a real need for additional support. They become empowered to step above and beyond their role or job description, when appropriate, and are willing to help with whatever is needed. And they learn so much during the process. This helps sharpen their leadership skills and overall medical skills here in the U.S. healthcare setting.”

Carolinas HealthCare System is a Points of Light Corporate Service Council member. To learn more about the International Medical Outreach Program, visit: www.carolinashealthcare.org/imo