

I remember we were scheduled to travel to San Nicolás Copán on a Wednesday. We were already done with the research in that area, but we still had to look for the family of one patient. I remember there was no road to get to the house and from the town we could see that the house was far away. We drove as far as we could, but then there was no road to continue and we had to finish the journey on foot. When we finally got to the house, my heart was completely broken by the scene before me. I saw five little children, malnourished and naked, with mosquito bites all over their bodies, playing in the dirt outside.

I approached the house and introduced myself to the woman that there. She told me she was the widow of the patient we were looking for. I began the conversation by asking how her husband had gotten from their house to the hospital since there was no road and I hadn't seen any cars nearby. She answered that he had been sick for six months before he died and on the day he went to the hospital, he told her he didn't feel well. He knew something was wrong, but he also knew that he needed to work the land in order to make money for the bus fare to the hospital as well as leave her something for their children. He died at the hospital several days after arriving and being diagnosed with gastric cancer.

This is our country, our population and our patients. People are dying because they can't get medical attention due to living conditions that don't have access to water, energy, food or reliable transportation methods.

This was an eye-opener to me.

My next story also changed my perspective about life. After approximately three months of research and actively looking for former patients and their family members, I still had not found one single survivor. It was in a poor area of Santa Rosa de Copán, where I found a woman who I am going to call "Doña María." I had thought Doña María was dead and I was surprised and shocked to find her in her house cooking red beans for dinner.

While we were talking, Doña María told me that she had been diagnosed with gastric cancer three years ago but that she had been determined to look for a cure everywhere possible. She had surgery at the Hospital de Occidente and then traveled to San Pedro Sula, five hours away, to receive chemotherapy. She told me that though the experience was horrible, she now felt very blessed and empowered.

That is inspiring.

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