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# Adventist Hospital of Nicaragua

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José Gabriel Gámez Hernández obtained his master's degree in pastoral ministry at the Adventist University of Central America (UNADECA, Alajuela, Costa Rica) and his master's degree in educational management from the Adventist University of Nicaragua (UNADENIC, extension of UNADECA), and a bachelor's degree in theology from UNADECA. He currently serves as president of the Northwest Adventist Mission of Nicaragua.

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The origin of the Adventist medical work in Nicaragua dates back to 1898 when Pastor Frank Hutchings made his first missionary trip to Nicaragua, sailing on a boat called *El Heraldo* on the Prinzapolka River. He reached the coast of

the city, where he was forced to anchor due to the threat of a tropical storm.<sup>1</sup>

## Brief History of Adventist Work in the Area where the Hospital is Located

Pastor Hutchings offered his dental services to the community in order to support himself. He could not support himself through the sale of Christian books, since the predominant dialect in the community was Miskito. Two missionary doctors from North America, N. M. Brayshaw and C. E. Nelson, established a small medical clinic in 1920 in Bluefields and years later they moved to Puerto Cabezas.

In 1948, Dr C. J. McCleary and his family reached the shores of the North Atlantic side of Nicaragua, specifically Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas), a community that had a population of 8,000, according to the testimony received by the elderly from the community of Tuapí, located north of Bilwi.<sup>2</sup>

## Initial Discussions and Plans to Establish the Hospital

Dr. C. J. McCleary started a clinic in a rented house, which he called “Adventist Clinic and Hospital,” and there he performed a series of minor surgeries. During the administration of Pastor Alvin J. Stewart, as president of the Adventist Mission (1946-1950),<sup>3</sup> Dr. McCleary made arrangements with the Standard Fruit Company to rent land for the construction of a temporary wooden clinic. He was supported by Pastor Stewart’s administration, donations from church members, and support from others. The construction of a hospital was undertaken. It became the second hospital in Puerto Cabezas and had a great influence on the population.<sup>4</sup>

The hospital in Puerto Cabezas enjoyed acceptance, prestige, and recognition by the Miskito community, as well as other sectors of the population. The government health agency recognized the remarkable service that the institution provided to the population, by attending to the predominant diseases of the time, such as smallpox, measles, dysentery or salmonellosis infections, respiratory infections, malaria, dermatological diseases, anemia, other diseases, and performing surgeries.<sup>5</sup>

## Important People or Groups that Implemented the Hospital’s Plans

In 1950 the nursing school began under the direction of Marjorie Bell, who had received an invitation from Dr. McCleary to serve as director of the nursing school. A few months later, another nurse, Mrs. Berenice Larrabee, arrived to strengthen the teaching staff. The school began with four students, all from Puerto Cabezas. Their names were: Ada Booth, Vida Taylor, Corinth Brooks, and Cora Hay.

On January 25, 1953, the first graduation was celebrated in the temple of the newly built Creole church. Pastor Larson, president of the Central American Union, gave the graduation speech and the dedication prayer. That same year, Marjorie Bell returned to Canada and was replaced by Rosa María Hennessy, who had graduated from the National Nursing School of Nicaragua.

In December 1953, Dr. Fred B. Moor, his wife Eddie, and their two children Benny (two years old) and Jimmy (eight weeks old), arrived at Puerto Cabezas where Dr Moor took over the management of the hospital.

## Founders of the Hospital

Dr. C. J. McCleary (1948), Alvin, J. Stewart (1946-1950), Marjorie Bell (1950-1953), Rosa María Hennessy, Dr. Fred B. Moor.

The Central American Union arranged with Dr. McCleary to assume responsibility for the hospital administration, effective January 1, 1954. Two years later Marjorie Whitney arrived to lead the nursing school. She strove to raise the quality of education and establish the requirement of admission to nursing school as completion of secondary or middle school.<sup>6</sup>

## Hospital Location

President Luis Somoza visited the hospital in Puerto Cabezas in 1956 and observed the prestige and success that the institution had achieved and the quality of care and medical services provided. However, because of the distant location and difficult access for the majority of the inhabitants of the main cities, it was decided to sell the hospital and relocate it in the city of Trinidad, Estelí, about 122 kilometers north of Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, on the Pan-American Highway.

A 161-acre plot of land was purchased from Héctor Mairena for the construction of the hospital. The initial investment cost US\$362,065. Additional investments were made in the following years, until 1976, of approximately seven and a half million córdobas.

## Construction Date

In January 1959, while the new hospital was still under construction, it opened its doors to the public, obtaining rapid acceptance and demand from the population. Exactly two years later the hospital was completely built and inaugurated by the president of the republic, Luis A. Somoza D., with the motto: “For God and Humanity.”

## Financial Resources

The Adventist World Church allocated part of the world offering for the last quarter of 1960 for the construction of the nurses' housing and classrooms. Pastor Roth, president of the Inter-American Division, handed Dr. Moor a check for US\$20,000.<sup>8</sup> Graduation of the first class of the nursing school in Trinidad took place on February 28, 1960, when seven young people who had started in Puerto Cabezas graduated, under the motto: “Service dedicated with love and loyalty.”

In 1960, the Moor family went to the United States on furlough.<sup>9</sup> In August 1960, Doctors William and Karen Shea arrived to take over the administration of the hospital. In 1963, Dr. Vernon Spark and his family assumed direction of the hospital.

## Construction Date of New Hospital Facilities

From 1964 to 1966, additional facilities were built, such as bedrooms and houses for employees, which were necessary due to institutional growth and development. During this stage the leadership of E. J. Heisler and his family was decisive for institutional development. They came from Kingston, Jamaica, where they had worked for ten years at Andrews Hospital. Heisler now accepted the invitation to work as the administrator of the Adventist hospital in Nicaragua (HANIC)<sup>10</sup> until 1972, the year in which Managua was shaken by a strong earthquake which devastated the city.

## Accreditation, Courses, and Degrees

Both the hospital and the nursing school had achieved popularity, prestige, and fame, inside and outside the country, being one of the best medical institutions affiliated with the ministry of health. The variety of services offered by that time were: general medicine, surgical medicine, and obstetrics care; and the hospital included a laboratory, physical therapy, radiography, two operating rooms, and emergency facilities. It had the capacity for 30 beds and 6 cribs, with a staff of three doctors, 16 graduate nurses, 23 nursing students, and 15 additional employees. The hospital contributed to the social and economic development of the people, providing a source of work for residents and a relevant resource for the spread of the gospel throughout the national territory and beyond its borders.

## Campuses and Buildings

In 1979 the Adventist hospital, due to the war that the country was experiencing, was invaded by a group of armed guerrillas who took possession of the facilities in order to take foreigners as prisoners, under the assumption that they were servicing the CIA and were therefore spies of the United States. They found Dr. Félix Galdós, of Peruvian origin, and Pastor Garry Gregory, whom they took as prisoner, and Mrs. Esther Calderón. After much prayer, Pastor Garry Gregory was miraculously released and left the country for Costa Rica, his country of origin.

The hospital ceased operation and the church lost this medical institution in 1980, after it had provided valuable services to the population since 1959. In 1990 the government of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro offered to return the hospital under the condition that the church would compensate more than 200 current employees of the hospital, now called *Pedro Altamirano*. The Church rejected this offer due to the high cost involved.

## Change of Name and Location

Twenty-four years later, a group of doctors who had served in the old hospital Trinidad—including Dr. Donald Vargas, his wife Cristina, and Dr. Sicalo—considered the possibility of making a hospital again. In the process of going through the necessary procedure to establish a hospital, they discovered that the legal status of the hospital was still in force in accordance with legislative decree No. 199 of August 31, 1920.<sup>11</sup>

In July 2003, this group met with potential donors at the Caulitlan Hotel in the city of Estelí. Following the meeting, they returned to their respective homes in the United States and Argentina, but not before establishing a commission to carry out various procedures, including updating the validity of the legal status.

This commission was made up of the following members: Dr. Dayton Vega Gutiérrez (lawyer), Plinio Vergara (ADRA Executive Director), Dr. Rafael Gil Gonzales (pediatrician), Víctor Morales Vallejos (bioanalyst), Dr. Gloria María Toruño Gámez (anesthesiologist), Pastor José Antonio Vargas Palacios, Dr. Mariano Cáceres Baca (pediatrician), Isaac Argueta (administrator), Mario Hernández (mission treasurer).

In February 2004, at the ADRA headquarters in Managua, it was decided to rent a house on Bolivar Avenue, in front of the Dávila Bolaños Hospital, in the Oscar Benavidez neighborhood of the city of Estelí. Among the resolutions, it

was decided that ADRA would facilitate the acquisition of medical equipment, as well as manage the request for tax exemption. The staff to work in the medical center were also chosen.

## Physical Changes of the Campus

March 28, 2004, marks the beginning of a new stage of HANIC, with Dr. Rafael Gil Gonzáles as director, with a staff of 21 employees, financed for a year by the Vargas family and Dr. Sicalo. Dr. Rafael Gil was director until April 2007. The board then appointed Dr. Emilio Caldera, who for a period of four months ran the HANIC. Dr. Rafael Gil again became manager from October 2007 to December 2010.

## Meaningful People in Hospital Development

For a year, Edita Hernández Osegueda assumed responsibility for the management of the hospital. Subsequently the bioanalyst Harold Darce was temporarily the manager. He was not there long due to regulations in the laws in Nicaragua which require that directors of health institutions must be doctors.

Pastor Wilfredo Ruiz, chair of the hospital's board of directors, convened a meeting to elect a new medical director for HANIC, and Dr. Socorro María Úbeda Herrera was elected. He has been in charge of the hospital's management from 2007 until the present. In 2011, Pastor Wilfredo Ruiz traveled through the country of Honduras and met Dr. Elie Honoré, director of the Adventist Hospital System of the Inter-American Division who, after hearing the report shared by Pastor Wilfredo Ruiz, began the process to integrate HANIC into the chain of Adventist hospitals worldwide.

## Staff Who Made Important Contributions to the Institution

During the first two years of the administration of Dr. Úbeda, growth and development of the institution began, which resulted in the acquisition of the laboratory and improvement of the pharmacy and operating room. Dr. Úbeda, considering the growth of the medical center, presented a proposal to Pastor Wilfredo Ruiz, president of the South Central American Union (SCAU), to build a small medical center.

Pastor Wilfredo Ruiz matured the idea at the insistence of Dr. Úbeda, and towards the end of 2012, with the support of the presidents of local missions, Pastor José Antonio Vargas, (Northwest Mission), Pastor Juan Ángel Guevara (Central Mission), and Pastor Juan Bosco Vanegas (Mission of the Atlantic), the arduous but exciting work was undertaken. One of Dr. Úbeda's first efforts was to obtain information on the requirements for establishing a Surgical Medical Clinic Adventist Hospital of Nicaragua. In 2013 the initiative was approved and the campaign to obtain funds for the project began immediately.

## Important Donations or Sources of Income

The Vargas family contributed to the realization of the dream with a donation of US\$200,000, and the Inter-American Division contributed US\$50,000. The fields provided a loan of US\$731,000, and the project was also supported by Loma Linda University, led by Dr. Richard Hart and Dr. Albin Grohar, as well as the Noble family. The hospital also used its profits for this project.

The support was not only economic, but also included logistical assistance and leadership training, as well as management for Adventist hospitals. On December 10, 2015, the first stone was laid to begin construction of the HANIC. On that occasion the following leaders of the South Central American Union were present: Pastor Wilfredo Ruiz Marengo (president), Ricardo Marín (secretary), Silas Martínez (treasurer), and Tomas Sáez (director of Revolving Fund). Also there were the presidents of the three fields of Nicaragua, Pastor Guillermo Evaristo García (Northwest Mission), Felipe Cordero (Central Mission), Javier Carranza (treasurer, South Atlantic Mission).

## Advances in Innovation and Technology

The engineer, Víctor Martínez Blandón, directed the construction that required 16 months of intense work, supervised by the architect, Bayardo Moya, and Dr. Socorro María Úbeda. The work was finished in 2017 and on July 25, 2017, a beautiful three-story building was inaugurated. The emergency, pharmacy, imaging, laboratory, observation, and laundry are located on the first floor. On the second floor are four offices, a waiting room, and an operating room. On the third floor there are ten rooms, a conference room, administrative offices, and a dining room.

Pastor Israel Leito was responsible for cutting the ribbon to inaugurate the building and presented the message for that special occasion, which also involved authorities from the Ministry of Health and the mayor of the city.

## Relationship with the Adventist World Church

The Adventist hospital in Nicaragua is accredited within the hospital chain of the Inter-American Division. Assistance and support have been given by the University of Loma Linda through Dr. Richard Hart and Dr. Albin Grohar, both economically and in advice and training of the administration of the Adventist Hospital in Nicaragua.

## Relationship with Region and Country

The Adventist Hospital in Nicaragua is strategically located at the entrance of the city of Estelí, on the boulevard that leads to the Central Park. The population of the city of Estelí is approximately 220,000. They prefer to use the hospital as an immediate alternative to avoid traveling to the capital of the country which is 160 kilometers away<sup>12</sup>

In the entire northern region, the Adventist hospital is the only private hospital, and five percent of patients come from the neighboring country of Honduras.

On June 25, 2019, the Nicaraguan government extended the operating license to the Adventist hospital, according to registry No. 3900. The hospital is authorized to provide emergency services and external consultation, including internal medicine, pediatrics, surgery, and conventional x-ray and ultrasonography. It is also certified for surgical service, labor and childbirth, hospitalization service, central sterilization and equipment, laundry, kitchen, maintenance, and administration. This license is valid until June 24, 2024.

The institution is self-sustainable and makes efforts to reduce hospitalization costs to low-income patients.

## Directors List

The hospital's medical directors from its inception in Puerto Cabezas were: Dr. C. J. McCleary (1948-1953), Dr. F. B. Moor Jr. (1954-1968), Dr. William Shea (1960-1963, in the absence of Dr. F. B. Moor), Dr. Vernon Spark (1968-1974), Dr. J. D. Rosales (1975, 1976), Dr. Donald Vargas (1977, 1979). In the new stage of the hospital, Dr. Rafael Ángel Gil Gonzales (2004-2010), Dr. Socorro María Ubeda Herrera (2011-2019).

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