



SpineHope

Transforming the lives of children
with spinal deformities

Where we've been and where we're heading...

By Beth Felker

Throughout the years SpineHope and its dedicated, thoughtful, talented team has sought to make an impact in the lives of children by providing intensive spine surgeries. These surgeries transform children's bodies and health, as well as transform their ability to live full of completely new possibilities. Their lives and their families' lives are changed forever.

Since Dr. Mardjetko's first trip in 2001, SpineHope has experienced much growth. In 2004 and 2006, Dr. Anthony Rinella, Dr. Matthew Geck, respectively, joined the team. Then in 2008, Dr. Rinella, Dr. Geck, and Ethan Lauer, CNIM, officially founded SpineHope as a non-profit.

Through these years, SpineHope has grown to include more medical experts, gained more supporters and followers such as yourself, and touched more children's lives.

Going forward, we aim to expand our services to reach even more children and their families. We are strategically planning how, where, and with whom to best realize our growth. Programmatically, we are exploring a new pilot site within Latin America and a domestic program that will allow us to bring children (and a family member) to the U.S. in order to provide the long-term pre-surgery treatment necessary for their rare conditions. In addition, we plan to continue expanding our medical training to U.S. and Latin American medical staff, in order to foster local and international sustainability, and to continue contributing the unique perspective and expertise afforded

through SpineHope trips to the medical community via research publications and presentations.

So, with our first newsletter we thank you for supporting our vision - that every child with a spinal deformity has the opportunity to have a normal life. Together, with your support, we can and are transforming the lives of children worldwide.

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Successes & Smiles Cali, Colombia May 2011

In one week, 70 total children served
 55 children evaluated in clinic
 12 children received surgeries
 3 children scheduled for surgery during our March visit
 34 children scheduled for an additional consult in 6 months
 13 children scheduled for an additional consult in 1 year



Ana Maria Montenegro, Tae Kwon Do champion

By Bridget Mortell

The first thing one notices about Ana Maria is that her smile lights up any room. After 12 surgeries, she is the happiest a 9 year old can be.

When Ana Maria, a Colombian SpineHope patient, first came to us, she was a two year old who's health was severely impacted by her scoliosis and additional medical issues. Ana Maria suffered from renal failure, respiratory difficulties, cardiac arrhythmias (tachycardia), a propensity for colds, tonsillitis, pharyngitis, tremors, and was unable to walk more than 3 blocks at a time.

Before entering the SpineHope program, Ana Maria had visited four different local hospitals without much relief. The last hospital she visited offered her surgery but cancelled on the day it was scheduled due to concerns regarding the surgery's complexity and potential complications. Ana Maria's mother was told the cancellation was "para evitar su muerte temprana," or to avoid Ana Maria's early death. Fortunately, two weeks later Ana Maria and her family were introduced to SpineHope.

Now, nine years old, Ana Maria has received 12 surgeries from the SpineHope team to correct her diastematomyelia, which included bone growing through her spinal cord and many malformed vertebrae. The surgeries have no cost to her family due to the combined efforts of SpineHope, the local hospital Fundación Valle de Lili, and the local social work group Casa de Colombia. In Ana Maria's mother's words, "*Cuando ustedes, los angelitos que Dios nos mandó la operación por primero vez la vida para todos en la familia nos cambió, llegó la esperanza de una mejor calidad de vida para mi pequeña, y de allí en adelante cirugía tras cirugía fue mejorando cada vez más.*"

"When you, angels sent by God to us, operated on her for the first time in her life, it changed the lives of everyone in our family. The hope for a better life for my dear little one arrived, and from then on surgery after surgery she kept improving more and more each time."

Ana Maria, now a healthy and happy little girl, trains in Tae Kwon Do, is a Tae Kwon Do champion in "pumses" ("form"), and is one of the best students in her martial arts school.

Every time we see Ana Maria at the clinic she showers us with hugs and kisses in expression of her thanks. Without a doubt, every one of our SpineHope team has been deeply touched by Ana Maria's strength, positivity, perseverance, and grace.



Welcome Beth Felker, our first Executive Director!



Beth has spent her career investing in and supporting health promotion initiatives for underserved Latino youth and families. She joins SpineHope with significant experience in strategic planning, program development, innovative collaborative ventures, and Latin American philanthropic ventures.

Most recently, Beth was a Program Manager with Health Leads where she collaborated with the Boston Medical Center's pediatric team and led a team of undergraduate advocate volunteers to address low-income families' social determinants of health as an integral part of health care. Previously, she piloted and managed a child obesity prevention program funded by the Ford Foundation grant, and has immersed herself in various Latin American public health and community development endeavors, including with Pathfinder International and Amigos de las Américas.

Drawing on her studies and work in a variety of medical and public health programs and experience living in Peru, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Ecuador, Beth brings to the Spine Hope team a deep, abiding passion for cultivating sustainable changes in Latin American children's health and quality of life.

Beth holds a B.A. double major in psychology and intercultural communications from Southwestern University and a M.A. in sustainable international development from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University.

In her free time, you can find Beth running, paddle boarding, hiking with her pup, salsa dancing, still learning to cook, and laughing with friends.

Inaugural Fundraiser

August 27, 2011

Chicago, Illinois

Our deepest gratitude to so many amazing individuals who helped to make our inaugural fundraiser a huge success. Your support is essential to achieving our mission - to transform the lives of children worldwide through surgery, education, and research.

We also want to extend our warmest thanks to our guest of honor Dr. Lenke for his ground-breaking work and support of our vision, as well as various vendors who helped make the evening a success.

International Museum of Surgical Science
Berghoff Catering
BMR4 (jazz band)
Mike Andrews, photographer

From your generosity, we raised just over \$40,000. Thank you for helping to create a world where every child with spinal deformity has the opportunity to live a normal life.



The SpineHope Team



U.S. Surgeons:
 Anthony Rinella (13 trips)
 Matt Geck (10 trips)
 Steve Mardjetko (8 trips)
 Mike O'Brien (3 trips)
 Craig Kuhns (2 trips)
 Jose Herrera (2 trips)
 Hooman Melomed (1 trip)
 Sassan Keshavarzi (1 trip)

Colombian Surgeons:
 Juan Uribe (17 trips)
 Mario Germán González (17 trips)
 Luis Felipe Villota (8 trips)
 Luis Fernando González, MD
 Mario Hernan Villegas, MD

Endorion Surgeon:
 Xavier Ramirez (1)

Casa de Colombia Director
 Margarita Lenis

Neuromonitoring Specialists
 Jason Kerwin
 Sarah Kinsey
 Ethan Lauer
 Beth Lindstrom
 Bridget Mortell
 Laura Muncie
 Jessica Walter
 Jaime Schultz
 Jade Morris
 Enida Mezini

Nurses/Patient Care Technicians
 Pat Battle, PCT
 Deborah Caruso, RN
 Kathy Harley, RN
 Elise Sanders, RN
 Arica Costello, RN
 Edith Martinez, RN
 Tina Tran, RN

Instrumentation Representatives
 Ryan Switz
 Brandon Black
 Chris Finlen
 Curtis Jackson
 Jim Julian
 Tom Morrone
 Sean O'Leary
 Cory Pomon

The Meaning of Hope by Jaime Schultz

When Bridget Mortell invited me to attend my first SpineHope mission last May, I had no idea what I was in for. I understood that I would not be speaking the same language as the people I was there to help, and I thought I might pick up a few Spanish vocabulary words. I did not believe that I would be redefining words and phrases that I thought I had learned in grade school. I expected hard work, and I would have been right if I had any idea what hard work really was. It turns out I had never worked so hard in my life. It is not because I had never made an effort; it is because what we do on SpineHope missions goes beyond what we classify as difficult.

The work we do in Cali, Colombia is extraordinarily taxing on the body, mind, and soul. The first time you walk into clinic, you are unprepared for the constant parade of twisted little pretzels of children. The first day in the OR is a shock no matter what condition the patient is in, because it is likely that none of the conditions you will encounter in Cali are what you would encounter in Chicago.

I had imagined charity; it turns out I had not learned what charity meant, either. Charity to me had been stuffing envelopes, giving money, or setting up bake sales and car washes. Instead, charity means throwing yourself into stressful situations because you cannot imagine walking away without giving every ounce of yourself. Charity means finding the last shred of energy left and turning it into three more days of work. Charity means watching a mother cry for

her son's fate, both when that fate is dire and when it is hopeful.

Somehow, I had also missed out on the meaning of hope... in the exam room at Fundación Casa de Colombia, hope means the possibility of sitting in a wheel chair without pain, being able to stand up straight for the first time, or gaining the function of an arm that was once only used to hold up the brunt of your feeble body. Hope means finding a hero speaking rough Spanish and believing you will hear him say that there is something he can do, because so far no one else has been able to help.

Teamwork and friendship were also terms redefined by my three trips to Cali, having expanded the concepts with Margarita, Bridget, Tony, Matt, and the rest. I learned what tired meant, and try, and trust... in fact, I cannot tell you everything I learned. So much of it goes beyond words. I can tell you that I am truly changed as a person and as a neuromonitoring tech.

Now, I go to work every day looking to help each patient with passion and scientific pursuit, and it is not ever just a job. No matter what is happening in my life, when I go into the OR, I take the team, the children, the experience of Cali with me. I believe that SpineHope does not stop when I leave Colombia. I believe that I take SpineHope with me. I'm honored to be attending a fourth trip in November, and I hope - truly hope - that I can continue to give of myself to SpineHope for years to come.

Get involved!

Donate

Support SpineHope children!

In addition, to in-kind donations...

\$500 allows us to assess one child

\$2000 provides surgery for one child

\$20,000 covers the expenses of one trip

Volunteer

For more information on volunteering in Cali, Colombia, please contact us at

Beth@SpineHope.org.



SPINEHOPE

PO BOX 16108
 AUSTIN, TX 78716-1508
 512-750-0788

WWW.SPINEHOPE.ORG
BETH@SPINEHOPE.ORG

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 FACEBOOK AND TWITTER.