

## Indigenous Mayan midwives and health providers exchange knowledge with NHH on maternal and child health

The Education Centre at Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) was transported to a remote rural landscape in Totonicapán, Guatemala, on March 24<sup>th</sup>, as midwives, family doctors, nurses, specialists, students and others gathered to learn and exchange knowledge on maternal, newborn and child health.

The unique talk and tour—coordinated by local international development organization Horizons of Friendship and NHH health-care providers involved with the group, including midwife Taryn Woolsey and family physician Dr. Paul Caldwell—was part of a combined effort between Horizons and its Guatemalan partner, the Association for Health Promotion, Research, and Education (PIES de Occidente), which is funded in part by Global Affairs Canada. Caldwell, who is also President of the Horizon's Board of Directors, traveled to Guatemala in February with Woolsey and other local health care providers as Canadian delegates.

In the spring of 2016, Horizons signed a multi-million dollar agreement with Global Affairs Canada that will see an ambitious new MNCH initiative in rural Guatemalan communities to reduce maternal, newborn and child health gaps for Indigenous peoples in Totonicapán, a primarily Indigenous Maya K'iche' province with some of the poorest health indicators in the country.

Introduced by Raul Scorza, Community Outreach and Communications Coordinator with Horizons, two Indigenous Mayan midwives, Angela Antonieta Pérez Vicente and Nazaria Ajanel Xiloj, with translation support from Daniel Quesada, Community Outreach Officer with Horizons, described in Spanish the day-to-day challenges of their work in Guatemala and the benefits of Canada's support.

In their remote communities, midwives—who are identified at birth for their role according to certain specifications within the Mayan calendar and often follow in the steps of their own mothers and grandmothers—serve many roles with little compensation, including nurse, physician, social worker and dietitian. Using a blanket and a scarf, the NHH visitors demonstrated how they must sometimes carry pregnant women on their back for help, walking many hours, when no other options are available.

Dr. Jorge Ariel Díaz Ordoñez, the medical lead for the community clinic in the region where they work, and a key support for the midwives when pregnancies or childbirth run in to challenges, spoke to the many issues he faces treating patients in a region of the world where the health system infrastructure and supports we have in abundance in Northumberland are not available. "One oxygen tank alone," he explained, "may take three months to be filled. As well, we have laboratory limitations and no blood bank."

Still, in 2016 alone, the clinic he has led for the past seven years saved more than 100 lives, thanks to collaboration with the Indigenous midwives, and the support of Horizons and Global Affairs Canada to provide some of the necessary supplies. Without these interventions, Dr. Diaz explained, in a region where more than 80 per cent of babies are attended in the home, these lives and possibly many more would have been lost.

For more details, please see the related news release on [nhh.ca](http://nhh.ca) or [horizons.ca](http://horizons.ca).

**"Everyone has a role to play. While there are many differences between our Canadian and Guatemalan practices, there are also many similarities – this is, at the end of the day, a human-to-human service – what the Indigenous midwives provide (comfort, care, assistance) is not all that different from what we provide here, in very different surroundings."**  
Dr. Paul Caldwell



## NHH helping to save lives in Ontario through organ and tissue donation registration drive

NHH staff, visitors and volunteers will be invited next week to participate in Trillium Gift of Life Network's (TGLN) organ and tissue donation registration drive with a simple ask: *check your registration status.*

Running April 3rd through 7th, the NHH campaign will feature an interactive information display and take-away material, continuing the hospital's on-going efforts to raise awareness inside and outside the organization around the importance of organ and tissue donation and, specifically, the steps Ontarians need to take to be sure they are properly registered.



Every three days, someone in Ontario dies waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant. This situation exists despite the fact that we have the cure, the knowledge and the tools to save them. We simply do not have enough organ donors.

"We're very pleased to be a small part in building awareness around the importance of organ and tissue donation," said Kayleen McKenzie, a professional practice leader at NHH, one of the event's organizers and a champion for TGLN at NHH.

Checking registration status is easy. Look on the back of your photo health card for the word "donor" (if it's there, you are properly registered) or check your status online at [beadonor.ca](http://beadonor.ca), which is also accessible on your mobile phone.

For those who check and find that they are not registered but want to be, the process can be completed through a few simple clicks, also at [beadonor.ca](http://beadonor.ca). Have your health card number and birth date ready. It only takes two minutes to register!