



Imelda and her daughter Alejandra arrived straight from Imelda's chemotherapy session. As they entered the waiting area and sat down, their eyes reflected fear and were brimming with tears, their deflated spirits evident. By the time we parted company, both mother and daughter were smiling brightly and filled with a renewed sense of hope, feeling beautiful on the outside and comforted on the inside. Esneda, who had driven three hours to get to Cali, Colombia, arrived similarly downtrodden, quiet and reflective. After receiving her prosthesis, bra, wig and rakish hat, she began strutting around like a model on a runway. She then danced with joy, grasping the hands of various volunteers and inviting us to celebrate her new look and improved spirits. Imelda and Esneda are just two of the 148 patients whose lives we were privileged to touch during our recent mission trip.

For a number of years, SOUL RYEDERS' Wigs Without Borders program has been supplying wigs, hats and scarves to the Partnership for Cancer Care and Prevention (PFCCAP) for their annual missions to Cali, Colombia, where they support women undergoing cancer treatment. Founded in 2006 by Dr. Armando Sardi, a Colombian-born and Baltimore-based oncological surgeon, and Dr. John Singer, a general surgeon, PFCCAP strives to improve cancer education, detection and treatment as well as access to care and support services in Colombia, South America where cancer has become a major cause of morbidity and mortality.

This March, we were invited by Dr. Sardi, Dr. Singer and Mavalynne Orozco-Urdaneta, PFCCAP's intrepid and kind Executive Director, to join their mission and help support women currently undergoing cancer treatment. We were grateful for the opportunity and felt privileged to work with the amazing cadre of American and Colombian volunteers. These volunteers provide support while honoring the grace and dignity of countless women enduring cancer treatment. From the moment we arrived in Cali, we immediately felt like part of the PFCCAP community, working together

toward a common goal of providing cancer patients with a wide range of services.

At PFCCAP's headquarters, where we spent much of our week, PFCCAP's Patient Navigator, Patricia Córdoba, greeted each of the women with a warm welcome, assessed their needs and discussed the services they desired. The women were guided from the welcome desk to a private area where they were respectfully and gently fitted with a new bra and breast prosthesis. Post-mastectomy reconstructive surgery is rarely performed in Cali so PFCCAP provides women with breast prostheses and special bras equipped with pouches to secure the breast forms. These items were very generously donated by American Breast Care (ABC). ABC's founder, Jolly Rechenberg, and his wife Dorthea played a

the women then enjoyed a pampering makeover provided by a volunteer makeup artist. Each client was showered with smiles, compassion and encouragement throughout the entire process.

Most of the women arrived at PFCCAP headquarters with profound fear, sadness and the weight of the world on their shoulders. Witnessing the transformation over the course of the visit was purely magical. Each of them left feeling happier, nurtured, and more confident - all of which was evidenced by their big smiles, the laughter and the warm hugs we received.

In addition to the nurturing care provided at PFCCAP headquarters, the mission also has an impressive medical training component through which the volunteer doctors train medical professionals in

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key role in our mission as they provided a large supply of these high-quality items and supported both the women who needed them as well as the volunteers who staffed the prosthesis fitting area.

From the prosthesis area, women who wanted wigs were escorted to our fitting area where we, along with the gentle and encouraging Colombian volunteers, helped them try on an array of wigs. From long, dark locks to short and sassy curls, the women were offered a variety of different styles from which to choose. Some found their preferred look on the first try while others gave careful consideration to a range of options before settling on their new hairstyle. Many of the women also had fun picking out their favorite hats, headbands and scarves among those donated by SOUL RYEDERS, and a few excitedly snatched up the crocheted blankets and shawls that our volunteers made. Proudly wearing their new wigs and hats,

Colombia with the primary goals of increasing early detection and improving treatment. The mission also has a health educational component, which includes speaking engagements at local schools to educate students about HPV and the importance of vaccination as a means of cervical cancer prevention. We witnessed the deep compassion and devoted service of the medical team, foundation staff and volunteers, including two inspiring patients of Dr. Sardi's who sought to pay it forward after recovering from the life-saving surgery he performed on them.

While we embarked on this mission trip to help and support others, we received so much inspiration in return. We treasure the friendships we made and our memories of the transformative experiences in which we were privileged to take part. Together we changed the lives of those affected by cancer one smile, one prosthesis, one wig, and one makeup brush stroke at a time.

