



## Featured Student: Beth Smyth

From RASA ST to SA Career News, March 2017



Beth standing in front of Hospital del Hermano Pedro, Antigua

**Name:** Beth Smyth, CST/SA

**City and State:** Port Washington, WI

**RASA Education:** Graduated October 2016

**Current Position:** ST/SA on Cardio-Thoracic team and general (ortho) surgery, Aurora Medical Center, Grafton, WI

**How did you get involved in surgery in the first place?** When I was younger, I worked in housekeeping on the OB floor, cleaning up after the deliveries. When I got a job in sterile processing, they allowed us to watch surgeries. One day they needed someone at the last second for a procedure and allowed me to scrub. They sat me down and said, "Hold this." That was the pinnacle turning point for me. The doctor later said, "You should do this. You have a steady hand." It's something I feel called to do and I love it.

From the beginning I knew I wanted to (suture) sew and be an assist and go on a surgical mission trip, but I had no idea how it would happen. It's been amazing to watch it unfold in my life.

**Most recent medical mission:** I served in a one-week mission trip last month in Antigua, Guatemala. James Larson, General Surgeon from Aurora, also came along. The trip was under the auspices of [GuatemalaSurgery.org](http://GuatemalaSurgery.org), in partnership with [Common Hope](http://CommonHope.org).

We did gall bladders, hernias, lipomas, lumps and bumps. I bounced back and forth between two general surgeons; there were two scrub nurses as well. In addition, we had a GYN team there; they had their own assists.

**Previous missions:** I have been on two other mission trips. One in January 2016 to Belize, but we brought nurse practitioners. It was more of a clinic setting, where I did patient check-in and beginning evaluation; I couldn't do as much there. The other mission trip was to Costa Rica four years ago. They were wonderful, but on this trip to Guatemala I was able to use my skills as a Surgical Assist!

**What was the setting like?** Unlike some medical missions, this was not that remote. It was an urban setting. We were in Hospital del Hermano Pedro in Antigua, which houses 250 people with cerebral palsy—live-in residents who have been there their whole lives; the majority were dropped off at birth. We got to meet and interact with them. Seeing them and how well taken care of was amazing! But health care in Guatemala is very poor, our operating room was quite different than the ones here, and of course no HIPAA law in effect.



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Beth with Nicholas, head nurse at Hospital del Hermano Pedro, Antigua

**How was the experience for you?** On the first day the doctor and I got to meet many patients. They had been pre-screened. Many of them were in tears, so grateful that their lives were going to change. We did about 50 surgeries total. The mission group was there for three weeks in a row, with several new people every week.

People said, "God bless you, God bless you, thank you." It was almost like you were famous; it was humbling. People came from 15 hours away, some of them on foot, to get surgeries done. The amenities are extremely different, yet people were so grateful. Back home, people get upset about the smallest things. I think everyone should be able to serve on a mission and get this kind of perspective. It was a such a blessing for me to see and meet these folks. They grabbed my neck and hugged me, "Thank you for giving me a new lease on life."

One thing that was interesting is that the people very rarely go home after surgery with pain meds. The doctors barely give them Tylenol; they don't have the narcotics. Yet the people were grateful, not complaining.

**What's next?** I'm already signed up to go on this mission again next year, and I'm waiting to see where I can help out with another mission trip. I have an 8-year old son and my goal is to take him along. (I'm a single mom with a very supportive ex-husband and family; that's why I have been able to take these trips.) I'm studying Spanish; I'm definitely called to Spanish-speaking countries. ■

