

THE GORGAS CANADIAN PATIENT CARE FUND

Thanks to donations and contributions of Basic Health International to the Gorgas Courses, the Tropical Medicine Institute Alexander von Humboldt and The Vice-Rectorry for Administration at Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia manage a fund named *The Gorgas Canadian Patient Care Fund*, which is destined to contribute to the management of patients attending the Institute and the Department of Infectious and Tropical Medicine at Hospital Nacional Cayetano Heredia. This document summarizes the main activities of the Institutions benefited with the fund, and gives insights about the scope of the fund itself.

THE TROPICAL MEDICINE INSTITUTE

The Tropical Medicine Institute Alexander von Humboldt was founded in 1968 by Dr. Hugo Lumbreras, his first Director. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Germany, the World Health Organization through its Tropical Disease Research branch, and the British Council were among the contributing institutions to its foundation.

The Institute has the mission of promoting research and teaching activities in the field of infectious and tropical diseases in Peru. Our vision is to become a recognized institution in the field with the aim of making contributions to the main public health problems of the country.

The Institute belongs to the Vice-Rectorry of Research and is located in a campus inside the Hospital Nacional Cayetano Heredia, aside to the main University campus. An agreement between the University and the Ministry of Health allows the Institute to operate in this public Hospital. The main research activities of the Institute are centered around tuberculosis; vector borne diseases with focus on leishmaniasis, malaria, and bartonellosis; retro-viral infections such as HIV and HTLV-1; enteric infections and bacterial resistance. Several teaching activities are conducted throughout the year involving both national and international participants. The pre-graduate course for medical students, the Gorgas courses in clinical tropical medicine and the Master degree in infection control are among the most recognized teaching activities of the centre.

THE HOSPITAL NACIONAL CAYETANO HEREDIA

The Hospital Nacional Cayetano Heredia is located in the north area of Lima; it belongs to the public sector and covers a population of almost three million inhabitants. It has approximately 460 beds divided in six major departments of medicine, infectious and tropical diseases, pediatrics, surgery, gynecology and emergency medicine. The Hospital has one the most modern Radiology and Microbiology services in the area.

The Health system in Peru is divided in several providers; the public sector is the main health provider in the country, the social security system is the second largest provider, but it is only accessible to those having a formal job, and the military health system which covers a minority of the population. Finally, the private sector covers health care using a pre-paid structure. The latest health system is growing fast among middle class people in the country.

The public sector covers almost 80% of the population. The structure of this system mimics a pyramid, with the base of it composed by community health centers that provide primary care and implement seven major community programs (immunizations, child growth, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, enteric and respiratory infections). Patients needing more complex care are referred to community hospitals and specialized institutes (Children´s Institute, Cancer Institute, Neurology Institute, National Institute for Health). The Cayetano Heredia National Hospital is one of three referral centers of northern Lima and has a longstanding history of being the most reputed Hospital in the area. It is also the only Hospital in north Lima that has an Infectious and Tropical Disease Unit and a Transplant Unit.

The population attending the Hospital is mainly composed of persons belonging to the lowest socio-economic levels of the districts of San Martín de Porres, Rímac, Independencia, Carabayllo and Comas. Although most of the population has access to basic sanitary infrastructure such as tap water, sewage and electricity, approximately 20% of them live in shanty towns (barriada in Spanish), where none of these facilities are available. These persons are among the most impoverished inhabitants of the city and are vulnerable to develop serious infectious diseases; tuberculosis for instance is highly endemic among them.

To help covering the health care needs of the very poor people of the country a special program called *The Health Insurance for the Very Poor* has been implemented by the Ministry of Health. This insurance covers costs related to ambulatory care and hospitalization of eligible patients using all available resources of the public sector. The admission of patients into the insurance implies a process that involves social and economic evaluation of the candidate.

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Despite of the implementation of the Insurance for the Very Poor, there is a need for complementary coverage of health expenditures at the Hospital. Not all patients qualify for full coverage by the Insurance; these patients, partially subsidized, still need supplementary health coverage. On the other hand, the Insurance covers only for tests and procedures that are available at the Hospital. There are many clinical situations where ancillary tests are needed that are not covered by the insurance; serological tests for tropical diseases such as fasciolosis, cysticercosis, hydatidosis, brucellosis, bartonellosis, specific culture media to isolate certain bacteria, and parasitologic tests to diagnose common etiologic agents of chronic diarrhea are few examples of the lack of coverage by the insurance. Limitations of the coverage by that Insurance are not restricted to diagnostic tools, but extend also to therapeutic agents, prosthetic devices, radiographic procedures including MRI and heart ultrasound, and other health costs including fees for outpatient visits and hospitalization charges. In addition, our unit receives a large proportion of patients who live outside Lima (estimated in 15% of the total burden of patients), the insurance does not cover the stay in Lima for these patients also.

The main objective of the Gorgas Canadian Patient Care Fund is to improve the overall management of patients attending our unit filling the gaps of the Health System mentioned above. Patients eligible to receive support by the fund are:

- Male and female of any age
- Patients attended at the Department of Infectious and Tropical Diseases including the Outpatient Clinic and the Hospitalization Service
- Patients needing financial support in the following categories; diagnosis, treatment, hospital costs (outpatient and hospitalization fees), stay in Lima, and transportation to and from the Hospital. Patients may need assistance in more than one category.

The allocation of funds is centered on individual patient needs. The process starts with a requisition by the treating physician, who applies to a committee of three persons; the Director of the Institute, the Chief of Nurses and the Chief of the Hospitalization service. The committee meets on demand and decides expeditiously the allocation of funds. The decision is communicated to the administrator of the centre who coordinates with the central administration for making available the fund required.

Since its implementation the Fund has contributed significantly to the management of patients in our centre, recent examples include the support in diagnosis and treatment of patients infected with:

- *Balamuthia mandrillaris* amoebic infection of the skin and CNS
- mucosal leishmaniasis
- tropical spastic paraparesis associated to HTLV-1
- tetanus
- juvenile paracoccidioidomycosis
- disseminated histoplasmosis
- fungal mycetoma
- non-tuberculous mycobacterial infections of the skin
- leprosy.