

## *Making a Difference Overseas*

# Lahey Radiologist Brings Breast Cancer Detection to Women in Need

Until recently, getting a simple test such as a mammogram or breast ultrasound was anything but simple for women living in the impoverished region of Bluefields, Nicaragua, on the country's isolated Caribbean coast. But now, thanks to the efforts of the nonprofit organization Radiology Mammography International (RMI) and Lahey's own **Alda Cossi, MD**, director of ultrasound, Diagnostic Radiology, women in the Bluefields region have access to breast cancer testing in their local hospital.

In late October, Cossi and other RMI volunteers traveled to the Ministry of Health hospital in Bluefields to deliver new, donated equipment and instruments, including the latest in film screen mammography and ultrasound, and to train local health care providers.

"Before our trip," explained Cossi, "breast cancer screening was only available to the few women who could afford the difficult trip across the mountains and jungle to the country's more modern west coast. Now women can have their tests done right in Bluefields."

Over the course of the two-week mission, Cossi and the RMI team trained local health care workers in everything from quality assurance to breast positioning to film interpretation. "First the technicians performed the tests on each other and other hospital staff before reaching out to real patients," said Cossi. "The main goal of this trip was to teach local caregivers how to perform the procedures so they can be self-sustaining." The RMI team also provided training in ultrasound-guided breast biopsies and basic ultrasound evaluations, including obstetric, abdominal and musculoskeletal exams.

RMI's mission is to support the mammography and breast cancer education needs of developing and underserved regions around the globe through technical assistance, donations and hands-on training. Cossi met Dick Hirsch, MD, RMI's founder, several years ago at a conference where she was providing training in ultrasound-guided breast biopsies. Hirsch was so impressed with Cossi's technique that he recruited her for a trip to Cuba. Cossi has also volunteered on missions to Nepal and Bulgaria.

"It's always a rewarding endeavor," said Cossi. "On the Nicaragua trip, for example, the whole city was excited when they heard we were coming. They were proud to be chosen as the hospital that would receive our help and have access to the best equipment in the country."

Cossi also reflected on some memorable moments from this latest trip, including meeting Nicaragua's first lady and just escaping Hurricane Beta. "Our friends at the hospital were so gracious—they were going to make sure we were safe if the storm hit by setting us up with food and mattresses in the mammography unit of the hospital because it has no windows. Actually, the people there went out of their way for us all the time."

RMI volunteers, including Cossi, are hoping to return to Nicaragua within the year to continue what they started.

"Right now, the only place women can get breast surgery is on the west coast," said Cossi. "If we can provide breast surgery training to the surgeons in Bluefields, women could get all of their breast needs taken care of in one convenient place. It could save lives."

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*Alda Cossi, MD, met Nicaragua's first lady, Lila T. Abaunza de Bolanos, while in the country with RMI.*