

## **Making a difference in women's lives**

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On a trip to Leon, Nicaragua, hosted by New Orleans Medical Mission Services this fall, Dr. Margie Kahn, center, checks on a woman who received pelvic surgery. (Photo by James D. Ray)

When Dr. Margie Kahn decided to go on a [medical mission trip](#) to Nicaragua this fall, she did what a lot of travelers do before their trips. She stocked up on supplies and gear.

Turning to eBay, Kahn purchased about \$500 in medical instruments. She also rounded up some supplies that medical device companies donated.

“I tried to predict ahead of time the things that we would need,” said [Kahn](#), a urogynecologist at the Tulane University School of Medicine, whose specialty is

female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery.

While in Nicaragua for a week, Kahn evaluated about 20 potential patients and operated on 10 indigent women who did not have access to the level of health care she could provide.

Conditions were tough. The local team put on air-conditioning in the operating room during surgery, but turned it off as soon as the operation was over. The operating table shifted when a patient was moved because the wheels wouldn't lock, and the camera she needed to use to look into the women's bladders didn't work.

But Kahn had operated in even more difficult conditions. About 15 years ago, she went on a medical mission to Africa.

Kahn's patients are women with fistulas (abnormal connections between structures) or organ slippage after childbirth, heavy lifting or straining with bowel movements over the years. Often, the women experience incontinence.

One Nicaraguan patient, an 89-year-old woman with pelvic organ prolapse, had tissue about the size of a grapefruit in her pelvic area. After the operation, "I think it was the first time in about 20 years that she could cross her legs," Kahn said.

Kahn paid out of her own pocket to volunteer for the medical mission. She also paid the expenses for her medical office assistant Gloria Narvaez to accompany her.

"They need us," Kahn said. "It's my area of expertise and we made a difference in these women's lives."

“There was a need, it’s something I do, and the opportunity presented itself.”—urogynecologist Dr. Margie Kahn