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CONTACT: Jaime Wrigley, OSMC · 2310 California Road, Elkhart, IN 46514 · 574.970.4458

OSMC Surgeon Again Provides Free Care to the People of Central America

For the second year in a row, OSMC Orthopedic Surgeon Mark Klaassen, MD, has traveled to Central America – this time to Nicaragua – to provide free surgery services to patients in need of first-rate orthopedic care in the country. Klaassen will be working with patients who have been living with debilitating pain and misery due to joint problems such as congenital hip disease, trauma or osteoarthritis. The mission is part of Operation Walk, a non-profit, volunteer-based medical organization with a 20-year history of providing free surgical care to patients in underserved countries where the availability of quality medical care is limited.

If the prior year's experience is any indication, Dr. Klaassen will be busy. Last year, when the team visited Guatemala, the group performed 72 knee replacements, 26 hip replacements, and 5 ankle and 10 foot surgeries. In total, 113 surgeries were performed on 76 patients, and for many the outcomes have been life changing.

All supplies – the orthopedic implants, instruments, sterilization and radiology equipment, antibiotics, drugs and dressings – are donated, along with the time and talent of Klaassen and his medical team. Their work is coordinated through partnership with local doctors in Nicaragua who provide logistical support, arrange hospital stays and staffing, and participate in patient care.

The value of Klaassen's work extends beyond the direct benefit that individual patients receive. Operation Walk also works to educate local surgeons, nurses, physical therapists and other medical professionals on the most up-to-date treatment options for joint disease.

Klaassen has a long history of working to advance the quality of orthopedic care available to citizens of developing countries. The son of missionaries, he grew up in Colombia where the positive impact of helping others was tightly woven into his character. Because of this childhood experience he is fluent in Spanish. He returned home to the U.S. as a 15-year-old to continue his education, culminating in the MD degree he earned from the Indiana University School of Medicine at Notre Dame and the I.U. Medical Center. He currently serves as Professor of Practice in the College of Sciences at Notre Dame. To arrange a telephone or face-to-face interview with Dr. Klaassen, please contact Jaime Wrigley at OSMC. 574-970-4458.

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