

# Doctor, can I hug you?

By: Delia Proenza, November 22, 2018

Dr. Cira Delia Valdivia Graña, a specialist in General Integral Medicine who works at Policlinico No. 1 in Cabaiguán [in Cuba], has very fresh experiences. She returned to her homeland last November 15, on the first flight of Cuban collaborators that left Brazil after the announcement by the Ministry of Public Health of Cuba that Cuban doctors would no longer continue with the More Doctors Program. The action was in response to the offensive statements of President-elect Jair Bolsonaro.

With her very white skin and her eyes, blue as the sky, she resembles many inhabitants of Rio Grande do Sul, the Brazilian state that welcomed her. This region, she says, was founded by German immigrants, whose stature and other physical attributes are reminders of such inheritance. The oldest of them speak German, but most of them – they are really mestizos - live in a poverty that unsettled the Cuban doctor when she arrived there on December 10, 2015.

"I think it was more shocking for me than for them. A Cuban doctor had already been there. The social system had a big impact on me. I found that there were so many modern things that were not within the reach of the poor. Most people live in houses built by the governments of Lula and Dilma. But they live in very unfavorable conditions. They are helped by social assistance and almost every day they came to the doctor's office to get something through us, even if it was only medicines.

"At first things were very difficult for me, because when there was something serious, I couldn't find a solution. I had an underweight baby who weighed 1,500 grams when he came home after being discharged. He had respiratory distress and jaundice, and I had nowhere to send him, because there was no pediatrician for all that. Then I convinced the municipal health secretary to be more supportive for the serious cases," she recalls.

She could not help everybody, but she managed, for example, to save Giovanna Machado, a teenager suffering from autism and mental retardation who showed up with intestinal bleeding and anemia. "Every day I sent her to the hospital. I managed to have an MRI done which was paid for by the municipality. An abdominal tumor was discovered. The doctors had been treating her for years, but they never palpated her abdomen. She had a colostomy, but it's been reversed. She is 16 years old and came to me when she was 13," she says, excitedly.

Every day she took care of more than 40 patients. They all wanted to be cared for by the Cuban woman. She explained why: "because you touch them, you take their pressure, you put your hand on their shoulder." Then, she describes how amazed those overjoyed residents of Cerro Largo municipality were – a place more than 200 meters above sea level. "They asked me, 'Doctor, may I hug you?' That's because they could not get to see a Brazilian doctor. Or they couldn't tell a doctor something like, 'I come with high blood pressure and my knee hurts.'" They were allowed to have only one condition. But we treated their problems ten at a time."

From where she lived it was a trip of only 25 minutes to Argentina. It was very cold almost all year. Nevertheless, in the town of Cerro Largo they regarded their solicitous, warm, and respectful doctor as an heirloom. They lined up by the hundreds last week at her office. They were not there with a medical problem, but rather to bid her farewell. And she embraced them all.

"The people there were very happy with us. Without even knowing the decision that was to come, they were already sad and crying because it was already set that I had to return to Cuba. They felt bad that they were going to be left without the Cuban woman, and bad too as they worried about who might come in my place, since it was already known that the new president did not want the Cubans.

"Some showed regret: 'Oh, I voted for him, and now?' Can I really tell you how I feel? I feel sorry for them. I feel sorry for them, because I know it won't be the same for them. We were three Cuban doctors in the municipality. There was a Brazilian one also who in part of our center cared for people who were better off economically. She saw 40 patients in 30 minutes. It would take us three or more hours to see the same number.

Many of the people were like family to her. "They didn't talk about politics, but they invited us to barbecues and shared with us, especially on Sundays. I learned to say some things in Portuguese, how to greet people and ask the basic questions, but I understood everything they said. Since I returned home, we have been communicating by telephone, since some of these people have mobile phones. Even the drivers must be missing us. They told us that it was an honor for them to work with us, because our treatment was uncomplicated and they had never seen that.

She's back in Cabaiguan. When this reporter looks for her co-workers to try to locate the colleague, they never stop praising her. And she, all humility, opens a window of her soul, but shows a deep sadness through the blue of her eyes, as hidden as those places where the day dawns for people who are without a warm embrace and who think of the woman they've lost.

[http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2018/11/22/doctora-yo-puedo-abrazarla/#.W\\_gxwk2ov3h](http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2018/11/22/doctora-yo-puedo-abrazarla/#.W_gxwk2ov3h)