

Fabiana Garcia

Deep In The Amazon, Doctors Are Saving Lives

By: Erica Firmo

Fabiana Garcia is no Indiana Jones. But that didn't stop her from packing her backpack with high-tech wireless medical equipment, grabbing her tent, boarding a Brazilian military plane and flying to a remote community deep inside the Amazon jungle a few weeks ago.

Garcia is a GE Healthcare employee and a member of [Brazilian Health Expeditions](#), a local non-profit group that sends doctors, nurses and other volunteers to some of Brazil's most faraway locations to provide free medical care to native tribes. On her latest trip, she traveled to the Amazon to work with a Yanomami tribe that has lived a semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyle for thousands of years.

Dr. Ricardo Ferreira, an orthopedic surgeon, founded Brazilian Health Expeditions in 2003 after travelling to the Amazon jungle and meeting members of the Yanomami tribe. "I found myself in the middle of nowhere with no one but a group of amazing people that truly needed me," he says. "I knew I could help them, and that's how I started the medical mission of my life."

For Dr. Ferreira, the experience is about more than just providing medical care to people living in a remote area. "It's also about respecting the forest and traditions of patients and their families," he says. "This is what making a difference means."

Like Dr. Ferreira, Garcia had also traveled to the Amazon on medical missions before. This time around, she brought a [Vscan](#) with Dual Probe*, a one-of-a kind portable ultrasound device developed by GE Healthcare.

"The device can fit in a pocket and helps doctors provide immediate care," Garcia says. "It also gives doctors additional information that can help them arrive at a diagnosis without having to transfer patient's long distances to the nearest hospital."

Brazilian Health Expeditions' goal is to guarantee quality health care to the country's most remote communities. Its volunteers have cared for more than 30,000 indigenous people from 54 distinct ethnic groups since 2003.

Every medical expedition carries a mobile tent – a field hospital of sorts. The tent includes advanced medical equipment to perform general clinical exams as well as ophthalmological, pediatric, dentistry and gynecological exams. The doctors can also use it to perform cataract surgeries and repair hernias.

More than 50 volunteers joined Garcia on this latest expedition. Doctors and surgeons performed 2,863 clinical exams and 239 surgeries. "This was our 33rd expedition and the weather was very warm, so some of us slept in hammocks," she says. "We would wake up very early each morning, go to the river to take a bath like the natives and then go straight to the medical tent to run a day full of activities."

Garcia says that three days before the group arrived at the Yanomami village, a 7-year-old girl badly injured her hand while helping her mother prepare cassava flour. "There was no surgery center nearby, so this little girl was bleeding for several days without proper care," Garcia explained.

But as soon as the volunteers found the girl, they sent her straight to the surgery tent to perform an emergency repair procedure, which prevented her from losing movement in her hand. "Without us, the alternative was a four-day trip to the nearest hospital," commented Garcia.