

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ASSISTANT DEAN OF UC IRVINE MEDICAL SCHOOL TO  
LEAD SOME OF THE LARGEST HUMANITARIAN MEDICAL  
MISSIONS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**

***Dr. Cristóbal Barrios, a longtime IMAHelps board member who has volunteered his surgical talents on every IMAHelps mission since 2011, has been appointed president and CEO of the Rancho Mirage, Calif.-based nonprofit organization.***

***Dr. Barrios will lead IMAHelps' July 28-Aug. 6 mission to Quito, Ecuador, which will have close to 100 volunteers, including a dozen UCI surgeons and other healthcare professionals. UCI students will also conduct research during the mission.***

***IMAHelps has provided free healthcare to over 100,000 impoverished people in nine countries over the past 23 years, including over 2,500 life-changing surgeries.***

IRVINE, California — A UC Irvine surgeon, professor and assistant dean of the U.C. Irvine School of Medicine has accepted one more responsibility: Leading some of the largest

humanitarian medical humanitarians in Central and South America.

Dr. Cristóbal Barrios, Jr. has been appointed president and CEO of IMAHelps after serving on the nonprofit organization's board of directors and volunteering his surgical talents on IMAHelps medical missions for the past 12 years.

Dr. Barrios replaces IMAHelps President and CEO Ines Allen, a native of Ecuador co-founded the Rancho Mirage, Calif.-based nonprofit with her husband, Tracey, in 2000 with the goal of providing life-changing surgeries as well as medical, dental and prosthetic services to some of the poorest communities in the Central and South America.

“My appointment is a natural progression of the volunteer work I’ve been doing for IMAHelps since 2011,” said Dr. Barrios, who just returned from medical mission planning trips last week to Guatemala and Ecuador. The next IMAHelps mission is scheduled for July 28 to Aug. 6 at Hospital General Docente de Calderón in Quito, Ecuador and will include roughly 100 healthcare professionals from Los Angeles and Orange counties, including approximately a dozen from UCI Medical Center. UCI medical students will also join the mission to conduct research projects.

### ***Medical Mission Research by UCI Students***

“The UCI students will develop and conduct a survey designed to provide information on the demographics of our medical mission patients, their expectations and reasons for seeking medical mission care as well as their satisfaction with the treatment and services provided by medical mission volunteers,” Dr. Barrios said. “The information collected through the survey will help us tailor care for future missions. Internal surveys of

medical mission team members will also be conducted to gauge their sense of meaningfulness and effectiveness so that we can identify ways to improve improve our methods of care delivery.”

The IMAHelps board appointed Juan Pablo Hoyos, a second-year UCI medical student, to oversee the survey research conducted in Ecuador and to serve as a liaison with the IMAHelps board. Dr. Barrios said IMAHelps plans to publish key findings from its upcoming medical mission research with medical journals in the U.S. and overseas.

In addition to serving as a general and trauma surgeon, assistant dean of the UCI School of Medicine, and clinical professor of surgery, Dr. Barrios himself is a widely published researcher who has presented his work in numerous conferences and peer-reviewed journals. His areas

***Dr. Barrios participated in UCI’s widely publicized 2019 surgery for Enrique Galván of Paraguay, who suffered from a condition some people call Elephant Man’s disease***

Dr. Barrios has volunteered on every IMAHelps mission since the group’s 2011 mission to Estelí, Nicaragua in addition to helping to organize every mission since then. He was also involved in the internationally publicized surgery for 28-year old Enrique Galván of Paraguay, who suffered from excessive tissue growths all over his face, chest and back caused by neurofibromatosis, a condition some people incorrectly call “Elephant Man’s disease.”

Dr. Barrios and another UC Irvine Medical Center colleague, Dr. Mark Kobayashi, a plastic surgeon, examined Galván during the IMAHelps mission to Luque, Paraguay, but concluded the surgery he needed was too risky to do in Paraguay, which also

lacked appropriate surgical equipment.

Dr. Barrios and Dr. Kobayashi subsequently spent several months in discussions with the management of UC Irvine Medical Center and ultimately convinced them to let them do Galván's surgery for free at the famed Irvine hospital as a humanitarian effort.

### ***Strategic Planning***

IMAHelps has also recruited another longtime volunteer, Delaney Serfling, to develop a new strategic plan to guide IMAHelps as it works to increase both its fundraising as well as the frequency and variety of medical missions around the world. Serfling is director of program planning and development at the Moore's Cancer Center in Cardiff-by-the-Sea.

Fundraising support is critical because IMAHelps needs donations to pay for the medicines and supplies used on each medical mission, which typically serves several thousand patients.

Unlike other nonprofits, IMAHelps has no paid staff. The group's board members and executive officers receive no compensation. Volunteers also cover the cost of their travel to participate in IMAHelps missions. This enables IMAHelps to use virtually all of the donations it receives to purchase medicines and supplies for each mission, with only a small amount of funds being used to cover the costs of accounting, insurance and storage.

Operating like a mobile hospital team, IMAHelps volunteers include general, orthopedic, plastic, maxillofacial and OBGYN surgeons, cardiologists, internal medicine doctors, pediatricians and dentists. The group's longtime prosthetist, Robert Openshaw of Odyssey Prosthetics and Orthotics in San Bernardino, has provided free leg prosthetics for more than 400 impoverished

men, women and children in six countries, giving them the ability to get up out of their wheelchairs and walk again.

“Our focus moving forward will be to expand IMAHelps’ reach to provide life-changing surgeries and other medical, dental and prosthetic care to even greater numbers of impoverished patients around the world, particularly to impoverished communities in countries we’ve never visited before,” Dr. Barrios said.

IMAHelps volunteers are planning site visits to hospitals in Colombia, Puerto Rico and the Philippines during the coming months to lay the groundwork for future humanitarian missions in these countries.

“We couldn’t do as much advance planning as we normally do during the pandemic because of all of the travel restrictions,” Dr. Barrios said. “But things are getting back to normal now and we are moving aggressively to plan a variety of big and small missions over the next several years.”

## **About IMAHelps**

Rancho Mirage, California-based IMAHelps is a nonprofit global health organization that assembles some of the largest private medical, dental and surgical humanitarian missions in the Western Hemisphere with teams comprised of as many as 130 volunteers. Over the past 23 years, IMAHelps has provided free medical, dental and surgical care to over 100,000 impoverished patients, including more than 2,500 life-changing and life-saving surgeries, from cleft lip and club foot repairs to pacemaker implants and other life-saving surgical interventions. The IMAHelps prosthetics team has fitted more than 400 patients in six countries with artificial limbs, enabling them to get up out of their wheelchairs and walk again. Meanwhile, IMAHelps dentists have provided tens of thousands of patients with everything from

teeth cleanings to root canals and extractions. For more information and to support our efforts, please visit [www.imahelps.org](http://www.imahelps.org).