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Final Paper

My journey to Bolivia for a 10 week medical internship program started out rough as 7 days before I was to leave the political situation in Bolivia became turmoil and their President kicked our Ambassador of the United States out of his country. It was no longer safe for American citizens to enter Bolivia, and all missionary and peace core volunteer's already in Bolivia were being moved to Peru. This was a shock to me, and therefore I had to make a decision: continue with a different program, such as the one in Ecuador or terminate going all together. I really wanted to go to Bolivia because the program there was centered on pediatrics and I believe this is the path I want to take once I became a Physician Assistant. I looked through the program in Ecuador and they offered two different programs. The first was an Urban/Rural program where you spent 7 weeks in Quito (the capital of Ecuador) and then 3 weeks in Chone (a rural city along the coast); or an Amazonian program where you spend 7 weeks in Quito, and then 3 weeks in Puyo (a city within the Amazon rainforest). I decided that because I already wanted to go to South America, a country where I could speak Spanish, and because I was already planning on going to Bolivia, I should not waste this experience I decided to go with the Urban/Rural program because it had been established for many years, and this was the first time they were offering the Amazon program. My time in Ecuador was an experience that I will never forget, it opened my eyes to a different culture, a different lifestyle, the hardships they endured, and it has changed my outlook on life.

I was placed with an older single host mother who lived alone, her name was Francia. She was very generous and treated me like her own daughter; providing me with the basic necessities (a clean house, ample food, my own room and bathroom) and some companionship. The way the rotations worked was that you are placed in a different clinic or hospital each week and would either go in the morning or in the afternoon for four hours, and then for the other half of the day you have Spanish lessons at the Amazing Andes Spanish Language School for four hours. A typical day would consist of: Spanish classes in the morning for four hours (8:00-12:00) and then there is a break for lunch and then clinical rotations would be in the afternoon for four hours (2:00-6:00). Depending on which clinic or hospital you worked at this schedule would be reversed with clinicals in the morning and Spanish in the afternoon. For the seven weeks that I was in Quito, I worked at many different types of public clinics and hospitals, because they are easier to shadow and observe. My observation and work ranged from Family Medicine, Pediatrics, Emergency Room, Adolescence, Gynecology, Maternity/Delivery Room, Surgery, Pediatric ICU, Neonatology, and Urgent Care. I would say I got to see a large spectrum as well as different aspects of the healthcare system within Ecuador.

One downfall was that I was only able to observe surgery in Chone, which happened to be my favorite. The surgeons explained what the operation was, what happened to the patient, what exactly they were doing as they were doing it, and they would show us organs and even allow time for us to take pictures. It was very neat, and a completely different experience from Quito altogether. In Quito it was very hard to see any surgeries other than live births and c-sections in the maternity ward.

My Spanish ability improved greatly while I was there. I came to Ecuador having a decent background in Spanish; I had studied the language throughout high school as well as one class in college however had yet to become fluent. I was hoping that this internship would fulfill that goal of mine. At this point, I would not say that I am fluent but I have improved greatly! I am able to comprehend the language much better. I can hold a conversation and I feel that it is starting to come more naturally. I am picking up on which tense to use and using it correctly and without having to think before saying what I want to say. I have learned while being abroad that in order to learn anything that is new you have to practice and not be scared! Everyone here was very patient with me, understanding and very helpful. If I took the time to speak with them, they would take the time to listen and help. Practice makes perfect, and I believe this phrase is true. At first I was afraid to talk to people, but by the end of my internship I was talking to patients, asking questions, asking for directions, talking to strangers on the bus about places to go and things to do, meeting new people, and conversing! This is how you truly learn a new language and I believe it has made a difference.

I feel I have gained so much from this internship both personally and professionally. First the ability to speak Spanish has opened my eyes to how different a culture especially a foreign language. For most people we are comfortable with our native language and when someone cannot speak our native language we get upset. For example, in the United States we speak English, someone who could not speak English or could only speak very little English would try and ask a question and others would get very upset with them instead of being patient and trying to help them. After being on the other side of the fence here in Ecuador, I now know what it is like for these people, as I

have been one of them. I have been in their shoes trying to ask for directions, use a bank, buy groceries, etc. and did not know exactly what I was doing or how to ask the question in their native language. It is difficult. After being on the other side I have a greater appreciation for these type of circumstances and after returning home I plan to help out as much as I can for those who have a language barrier. I do not want language to be a barrier that separates people but rather I want to use my knowledge of both English and Spanish and help those around me, and lessen that gap.

Furthermore, I have gained a greater perspective of what the healthcare system is like in Ecuador and the hardships they endure. In Ecuador, healthcare is supposed to be free however there are restrictions. For one, medications are not free. Most people here cannot afford to feed themselves let alone pay for the medications needed. For example, I saw a boy who was 6 years old who had asthma and could barely breathe. It was the second time his mother had brought him into the clinic for his breathing in four months; when you listened to his lungs you could tell he had asthma. They were given a prescription in the past, but could not afford to buy it; therefore her son has been suffering and would most likely continue to suffer. The doctor tried to explain that without this medicine her son will not get better and his breathing would only get worse...the mother said she understood but it was unlikely that he would get the medication that he needed because of the cost. After talking to the doctor, I learned that this happens in most cases. Parents will bring in their sick children to the emergency room, the doctor will tell them what is wrong with their child and what medication they should take and will give them a prescription and then in most cases the parents do not

buy the medications. It is a horrible circumstance and something needs to be done, however at this point where do we start?

On the flip side, I have gained a great amount of knowledge as well about how I want to interact with my patients once I become a Physician Assistant. I had the opportunity to see many different types of doctors; those who spent time with their patients and have a deep bond with each and every one, as well as those who I felt sent them in and out like they were on a conveyer belt. I want the type of relationship where I can bond with my patients, understand them and get to know them on a deeper level. Not only be their doctor but also their friend, someone they can trust and confide in. Nevertheless because most of the clinics and hospitals are public here that is almost impossible because the doctors want to see as many patients as feasible, and getting to know and talk to them takes time; time that they do not have. This had to be one of the biggest hardships for me, how could you fathom seeing 50 patients in one day? One was coming in before the last was even done, and the residents were already taking the history on the next patient while the doctor was finishing up with the last in a tiny 10x10 room, and it did not seem to bother any of the patients. I guess for them this is customary and acceptable, unlike back in the United States. Although America is a developed nation and we have the resources available to us to have a superior healthcare system and support our citizens in a clean environment; we have our own problems as well. This is the same situation in Ecuador; they have private healthcare facilities which are better than the public ones. It all comes down to how much you can pay for the type of healthcare you will receive. I believe that for the resources Ecuador has they are doing pretty well; they take what they are given and go a long way with them.

The biggest challenges for me in the internship would be: at the beginning of the internship the language barrier in the medical sites. However as the weeks went on, and my confidence in my Spanish improved this challenge for me subsided and I started to relax and enjoy myself more each week within the rotations. Not only did I start to notice a change but so did the doctors, they could tell I was becoming more confident with myself and my Spanish and would talk and explain to me more what was going on with each case! The other main challenge for me was being away from my family for ten weeks, I had never traveled extensively to a foreign country alone for a long duration of time. Being in an unfamiliar location with unfamiliar people, speaking a different language came as quite a shock at first but I handled it better than I thought I would. I didn't start to really feel homesick until about the eighth week in but then I had made good friends here and my life in Ecuador had become normal and routine that I started to feel customary, secure and confident in myself both on a personal and public level.

This internship was an amazing experience and something I will always remember! It has changed me as a person, as well as opened my eyes to different cultures, people, lifestyles, and healthcare systems. I have gained a greater appreciation and understanding for those around me and my surroundings. I will always remember my time in Ecuador. This is an experience that I recommend to anyone who has not traveled alone to another country, I feel it is something everyone needs to do in their lifetime. I cannot explain how it will change you, or how it will affect you; as it affects everyone differently. However, I can promise that in some way it will change you, and your outlook! Mine was defiantly for the better and I am so thankful I had the opportunity to explore Ecuador!

For future interns my advice is to have fun! You are only here for a short time so do everything you want to do, explore everywhere you want to explore and if you are not happy with something tell someone. Everyone is here to help you, and you want to have the best possible experience you can! With transportation on both the Trolle and Metrobus make sure you keep your backpack in front of you and do not take anything of high value with you. When they are very packed, robberies can happen. I was lucky, and never had anything stolen (robbed), but just be smart and careful! I took my wallet and camera with me and had them in my backpack but just knew where they were and had my hands covering my backpack and was watching it at all times. The robbers cut your bags and are very good at it, a couple kids we were with did have this happen to them and they didn't even know it, so just a heads up! Be careful! For entertainment the Mariscal is the "Gringo" place to go. There are a lot of restaurants, internet cafes and bars to hangout at. If you want to bring your computer, I would say that is okay. Again just use your head and be smart. I brought mine. Close to where everyone lives there is a place called "Plaza de Las Americas" which has wireless internet access and you can use your laptops. (Right now you have to get an access code from a café, restaurant, etc. so I would buy a hot chocolate or something small to get the code and then you get unlimited internet access for the day.) Go out around the city and explore! There is so much to see and do! Make sure you take advantage of everything and do everything!! Travel on the weekends! There are a lot of cool places to go and exciting things to do!

All in all, this internship was something I will always remember. The medical aspect, the Spanish aspect, the culture, the people, the friends, and most of all the person I have become to be through this experience!