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Final Report
IE3 La Paz, Bolivia

Bolivia. My first thought when applying for this internship was, where is Bolivia? Even after spending three months there, people ask me where it is or think I went to Mexico. I didn't know what to expect and all wikipedia.com told me was that Bolivia is the poorest country in South America. Getting ready to embark on this land-locked country for 10 weeks alone and without a good knowledge of Spanish, I was just getting myself into trouble, so I thought. But going to Bolivia through IE3 was probably one of the best decisions I made. Not only did I get a better idea of what the health field would be like, I got a better understanding of what I was capable of. I no longer was afraid of being alone but am now more independent than ever. But I didn't have this mentality the whole trip.

The first week in La Paz was a mixture of excitement and curiosity for me. I wanted to take pictures of everything and go everywhere. The first day of clinic was where I got my first culture shock. I went to Hospital de Los Andes in a city located on the outskirts of La Paz. Los Andes was where the poorer and indigenous people lived. The hospital was a small building but had a long line waiting at the front door before any of the doctors were there. As soon as the doors opened, the waiting room was crammed with crying babies and tired mothers. There was a smell that was unbarring. I tried to only breathe through my nose because when I inhaled through my mouth I would gag. The doctor led me to a small room where there was a single bed with a plastic sheet on it. The plastic sheet had dirt and just wasn't sanitary. As soon as I settled down it was time to see patient after patient. I was so surprised of how much they expected of us. I am not a

medical student and have no prior education in using a stethoscope or what to check for, but the doctor handed me her stethoscope and expected me to do the entire check up. It was very difficult because first of all I was not adjusted to be surrounded by the Spanish language yet and I had no idea what to do. I constantly just said, "Todo esta bien," which means all is good. I figured since she was letting me do it, there was no major problem. But as the weeks went on, the less scary going to clinics were and more excited I was to go to work each morning.

By the end of week 1, I already had learned more than I expected for the entire internship. I recall writing to my family back home and describing everything I was able to do at the hospitals. The doctors were all so open to teaching us about the health issues that Bolivia faced. They were so helpful in the case that if there was an area of interest in the hospital they would make sure your desires were met. I was lucky to work with a doctor that was trained at Stanford for two years and know quite a bit about CFHI. He was the chief of surgery and let me work across from him during surgeries wiping the blood or hold body parts opened. Professionally I have grown so much and built so many great relationships with the doctors in Bolivia. I wanted to be a good asset to CFHI and portray myself as a U.S. citizen in a good light. I felt like I was a guest in their country and should be respectful at all times. Everyone constantly asked where we were from and sometimes there were negative reactions when people realized that we were from the United States. There were some labels as being ignorant, uneducated about our own country or being rich. I felt as if a go2li

The biggest challenge for me was being away from home for such a long period of time. I enjoyed being in Bolivia and working but it would be perfect if during week 5 I was able to go home just to pop in and say hi and go back to Bolivia. I have never been away this long before and it was difficult to hear about events back home that I was missing out on. But they were missing out on the adventures I was partaking in Bolivia as well. As soon as everyday life became a routine, things were much easier and time flew by much faster.

Each morning I would wake up around 7:30 and get ready to put on the white lab coat. I was amazed of how powerful the white coat is. As soon as I put that on, people instantly give you respect and think you are a doctor. I had to constantly repeat that I am only a student from the United States. At the hospital, I would go suit up for surgery or sit in the consultation room. On Thursdays I would go to the hospital in Los Andes to follow an anesthesiologist that I met there. He knows some English and loves to sing and dance in the operation room. Looking back on my trip, I am grateful for all the wonderful people I met. I got to work with great doctors everyday, get to know residents and learn about how medical school worked there, and I got to see the world outside of the U.S.

My impression on Bolivia has completely changed. The weeks prior to departing what I have always known, the U.S., I began regretting applying to go to Bolivia. I kept thinking why can't I go somewhere prettier and cleaner like Europe or touristier like Ecuador. I did not know what to expect in Bolivia. When we landed all I was were big fields of grass and tin roofed houses, I was still scared. But after 10 weeks of being in Bolivia I have such a great appreciation for the country and South America in general. I love the Bolivian people. They work so hard and are so friendly. I met a saleswoman who

sold hats, scarves, sweaters and other souvenirs. She would call me “senorita” each time I came and gave me a discount. When I told her I was leaving she gave me a hug and wished me the best in the future. I loved meeting people in Bolivia whether it be another tourist or local. Everyone had an interesting story. That is when I concluded that people are amazing. What people are capable of is just amazing. I met someone that had ridden his motorcycle from Vancouver, BC to Bolivia or seeing woman carry pounds and pounds of weight wrapped in a blanket on their backs and walking miles. People are amazing and are capable of doing so much. This internship has definitely made me realize that you do not know what you are capable of until you are put into that situation. I am so grateful at the end results of this internship. Not only did I get better knowledge of the issues in Bolivia, medical issues, or gain relationships, but the best part is what I get to live with for the rest of my life, the memories I created. I am so happy I ended up going to Bolivia because Bolivia has so much beauty and culture that no one knows about. The culture is still so alive. Nowadays people have adjusted or modernized to the majority that it is hard to get a deep understanding of different cultures, but in Bolivia there are people who still dress as their ancestors did and believe in the same remedies.

Before I arrived I wish I wasn't so narrow minded. I wish I knew that La Paz, Bolivia was going to be like any other big city. There were cafes, clubs, fancy restaurants and markets. I wish I studied more Spanish so I could be more capable of practicing instead of standing quietly and trying to absorb all the information when someone is talking. I wish I knew more Spanish so I could engage in conversation.

To all future interns, don't be scared but be excited. Traveling to other countries is the best way to understand how small we are in relative what is out there. Be open-

minded. A good fact to know is that when people are yelling things outside a van, they aren't yelling at you but where they are going so you can hop on if you wish. Be careful of buying too many things in Bolivia although everything is cheap because you might have to pay fifty-eight extra dollars like me at the airport because your luggage being overweight. Don't sit in the aisle seats on buses because the indigenous women wear big skirts that are surely to constantly hit you in the face when they walk by. I don't know what more I could advise because the first hand experience alone is the best way to go at it and sometimes get you the best of memories.