

## Internship Journal Summary:

### Child Family Health International Cultural Crossroads in Healthcare Program Oaxaca, Mexico

About the time I began to look into my health science internship, the CFHI organization was brought to my attention. Having always been interested in medicine, hence the Health Science major, but more specifically international health care, I had never had any direction along this path. This internship also came at a time where I knew I had to make a solid decision as to whether I was going to pursue the MCAT and the long medical school journey upon the completion of my major the following fall. I settled upon the Cultural Crossroads in Healthcare Program in Oaxaca, Mexico because of its focus on the intersection between modern healthcare and established cultures that is so prevalent in many countries today, as well as providing a perfect opportunity to practice my medical Spanish.



Oaxaca is the fifth largest of the 31 Federal States of the United States of Mexico. It has 16 formally registered indigenous communities each with their own language and in addition, it is the second-poorest Mexican state. All these facts I had read before, but upon my arrival in Oaxaca in early August, they became a reality as I began the first of four week long clinic rotations.



I began at Centro de Salud Xochimilco, a primary care clinic located in urban Oaxaca. Although I appeared to be a doctor in my white coat, and was even referred to as “Doctora” by some patients, I was unsure at first what my role in the clinics was to be. I spent much of my time at this clinic quietly observing consultations. This was my first exposure to



anything other than the American healthcare system, there were many differences that I immediately noticed, one of the most interesting being that the patients never questioned why I was present during their consultations. While at this clinic, I participated in a Dengue walk to the local pueblas and witnessed first hand the language barriers created by the 16 indigenous populations of the region. It was in this clinic that I truly came to appreciate the medical Spanish course I had completed earlier in the summer.

My second rotation was at Centro do Rehabilitación Infantil Teletón, CRIT, a facility for physically and mentally disabled children, ranging from infants to 18 years old. It is a beautiful state-of-the-art facility, honestly seeming slightly out of place in Oaxaca. By this time, I had gained confidence in my Spanish and was able to be much more hands-on in this child-friendly environment. Most of the therapists were around my same age and having worked with children for many ears, I felt very comfortable in this setting and was able to be very hands on with the patients. I came to appreciate the fact that the more you speak up, the more you are able to participate, and I came realize what a rewarding experiences it was to know that I had actually played a part in a child’s development and recovery.

During one particular occupational therapy session, I sat with the mother of a child with severe cerebral palsy. She mentioned to me that she had three other children who live in Los Angeles with her husband. I questioned why this was the case she explained that they had all moved there to pursue the “American Dream”, but her son could not get the treatment he needed at a reasonable cost under the American healthcare system. She therefore had to make the difficult decision to move him back to Oaxaca so

that he could receive treatment at CRIT where they are covered by Seguro Popular (Mexican Social Security). This story has left me even more intrigued by public health as well as encouraged me to pursue a career in international medicine so that I may make a positive contribution to individuals in similar circumstances.

By my area third week I was prepared for Hospital Civil, the general hospital located in the northern urban of the city. Hospital Civil was like no other hospital I have been in before, the waiting area is constantly filled to capacity with lines of patients and families extending out into the courtyard every hour the hospital is open. Some wait through the night and vendors sell sodas and traditional Mexican street food to the crowds. The halls are filled with gurneys; some occupied when there is not enough bed's available, and any other space in the halls is used for medical supply storage.

The first day at Hospital Civil was spent in a lecture conducted completely in Spanish on nosocomial infection rates in Mexican Hospitals. Aside from noticing the vast improvement in my Spanish skills, it was very surprising to learn that Mexican hospitals actually have lower nosocomial infection rates. This is due to the fact that the patients actually spend less time in the hospital mostly due primarily to a lack of resources.



The first patient we saw was a very undernourished 9 year old girl laying motionless in her bed, a bandage covering her head which was elevated to 30 degrees to help prevent postoperative brain edema. The doctor explained that she had been playing out in the street in her village and was struck in the head by a stray bullet. The bullet entered at the back of her cranium, crossed her corpus callosum and exited just over her eye. They had preformed emergency surgery, but the extreme swelling that resulted left her in a coma. She twitched from time to time and would half open her eyes, only to reveal a blank stare. The doctors said that this reactivity did not indicate perceptivity and

that she may never recover. When I asked about her family, he said they visit occasionally but understand very little of what the doctors explain, and since they do not live or work near the hospital it is often difficult for them to visit her. This was a very memorable experience because of the very sad reality of the situation and the fact that it clearly showed an aspect of medicine that is rarely discussed. Although difficult to



accept, one attribute of a good doctor is to do as much as possible for a patient and their family, but also to have patience and dutifully accept that there may be nothing to be done at the moment and that other patients need your full attention as well. It seems to be very common sense after the fact, but is understandably challenging as well.

My goals from the onset of the program, having always been fascinated by women's health, had been to observe a natural birth and I knew that this hospital was my opportunity. That particular day 40 babies were born at Hospital Civil, an impressive number seeing as that the average is close to 25. After a little light-headedness during the first birth, I realized that this was not only something I could not only handle, but that I truly enjoyed being a part of. After scrubbing in and observing multiple births, I was able to become more of an integral part of the process, under the supervision of the head



physician. This was truly one of those days where I left the hospital hardly believing what I had been fortunate enough to participate in, and is another outstanding moment that has strengthened my passion and for medicine and has truly encouraged me to continue along this path.

On the fourth week, my internship came full circle when I returned back to another Centro de Salud Clinica Sanidad Municipal. In addition to being a general consultation Centro de Salud for the Centro Histórico neighborhood, half of Clinica

Sanidad Municipal provides services to sex workers of both sexes as well as STD prevention programs. Within the city, prostitution is tolerated and regulated by the Mexican Ministry of Health, although it cannot be defined as legal.

In contrast to my first week in a Centro de Salud, I was a much more integral part of the healthcare process, and surprised myself by how much I had learned about the language, culture, and healthcare in Oaxaca. This was by far where I acquired the most clinical skills. I was taught to take blood pressure using an sphygmometer and stethoscope, give and intramuscular injection, and perform visual pelvic exams on both male and female sex workers.

In addition to the assigned clinical rotation, the CFHI preceptor in Oaxaca was also the Medical Director of Clinical Hospital Carmen, the most prominent private tertiary care center in the city. The protocol for observing surgeries here was to check the whiteboard near the operating rooms and simply choose which one I wanted to observe. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to further explore my interest in caesarian sections, as was able to observe the stark contrast between the healthcare provided by the Mexican social security system at Hospital Civil, and that which private funding provides.

I have since embarked upon the long journey towards a medical career and my most prominent quality at the moment is my unyielding passion to learn and become educated in medicine as well as public health. I have had the opportunity this past summer to witness the patient-doctor relationship in many



forms and have come to comprehend its potential to be remarkable. In my opinion, the ability of a doctor to utilize their scientific knowledge and training to the best of their ability in conjunction with the extremely personal, enlightening interactions inherent in this relationship is one of the most captivating aspects of medicine. I am particularly

intrigued by Pediatrics and Women's Health, and my experiences this past summer have only increased my interest in these specialties and encouraged me to pursue them within the international medical community.

My desire to further incorporate my awareness and knowledge of public health into my future as a healthcare provider stems from the fact that I realize how individualized medicine is. I truly appreciate the wide breadth of the population public health is capable of affecting. I am very proud to embody an intense desire to do what I can to help people and I feel this quality is very important, as I will undoubtedly continue to encounter individuals who may have come to their lowest points. It is very empowering to know I possess the confidence to offer what I can to help them, and by pursuing a medical education, I will continue to have more knowledge and training to offer.

