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Andean Health Program in Quito, Ecuador
September 2008

I was pleasantly surprised when I saw the diversity Ecuador had to offer. The scenery was absolutely breathtaking, from the mountains to the coast to the Amazon jungle. Ecuador also had a rich indigenous culture, which I fortunately was able to experience during my one month stay. My goal of doing this CFHI program in Ecuador was to have a once in a life time experience in a culture completely different from mine. I also wanted to come out as a different person, which I feel I have.

During my first and last weeks in Ecuador, I volunteered in the emergency room of Hospital Eugenio Espejo, the main hospital in Quito. In this single small room, we would see up to four patients at a time. Since I am a pre-medical student, I do not have much clinical background. However, Dr. Vazquez, the main doctor working with me, taught me how to take blood pressure, give injections, draw out blood and ask patients in Spanish about their health problems.

Many of the patients coming to Hospital Eugenio Espejo were underserved, mostly coming from the indigenous community. It is hard for poor patients to travel to a hospital, and wait for hours to finally see a doctor. A reoccurring problem I saw was that patients had long term illnesses that have been untreated because of the inconvenience to go see a doctor. I remember an older lady with diabetes who had a bacteria growing on her ankle. Since she had waited so long to come in, the bacteria went through her skin all the way into the bones. The doctor had to chip off some of the bone to get the bacteria off. Patients should not have to wait until the pain is intolerable to finally receive healthcare. I now see the importance of reaching out to the undeserved communities. Health care is not a privilege, but a right.

One of the most unforgettable experiences in Ecuador was that I was able to visit an indigenous clinic called Jambi Huasi in the town of Otavalo. This clinic was a mixture of modern and traditional medicine. It was interesting to talk to the doctors who practiced modern medicine, and compare it to how different their techniques are from the indigenous doctors, known as Shamans. The Shaman used a variety of traditional techniques such as using eggs to absorb bad energy when someone is sick. Also, there is a type of diagnosis method known as a limpia.

During my stay in Ecuador, I realized how important health education is. I remember that during one of the weekly meetings with Dr. Susana Alvear, the medical coordinator of the program, we discussed the high occurrence of sexually transmitted diseases among the Ecuadorian population. There is also a high rate of teenage pregnancy. Unfortunately, there are not many programs for health education in Ecuador. Diabetes is also a very common disease found not only in Ecuador, but in many Latin American countries. This could be due to the high carbohydrate diet. Because of my experience with health issues in Ecuador, I have learned how important it is to educate

people on how to take care of themselves. If people know more on how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and what types of nutritional foods to eat, then the occurrence of these diseases would be much lower throughout the world. Therefore, I now understand that health education is necessary for Global health.

Living in Ecuador for a month has made a different person, and I am thankful for that. Not only have I made long life friends, such as my home stay family and other students in the program, but I return to the United States with a belief that I can make a difference in the world. The enduring lessons from my experience have already affected me and will continue to affect my future. These lessons include the importance of health education for a better world. Last summer, I used to volunteer as an ESL teacher by teaching English to Mexican migrant farm workers. I want to ask the advisor of this program to see if we can add a half hour session for teaching health education. I also learned that many people are unable to receive even basic healthcare needs.

Another extremely important lesson that I learned is that anyone is able to help. This past month, I saw that any sort of help is beneficial to the undeserved, and even I, a student who is not even in medical school yet, can change the world by reaching out to those who need help. I return to the states more optimistic, and that I now need to spread awareness of the health problems overseas.

A Typical Day in Quito

During my one month stay in Quito, I became accustomed to the daily rituals. On weekdays, each day started off with a breakfast that the host family makes. My host lady, Francia, would usually make a ham or cheese sandwich, a fruit bowl, and tea. It was really important to eat everything at breakfast since it would be many hours until lunch.

After breakfast, I would do my clinical rotations. Most of the clinical sites were quite far, so it was necessary to take the trolley, which is one of Quito's main transportation systems. Conveniently, the trolley station was only a 10 minute walk from my house, and it cost only 25 cents to get on. I worked at the clinical site from 8 am to 12 pm. Each week, I would change clinical sites. This allowed me to learn new things and interact with different people. My first and last week, I worked in the emergency room at Quito's biggest hospital, Eugenio Espejo. At this site, I learned how to take blood pressure, give injections, and speak better medical Spanish to patients and doctors. The doctors didn't know much English, so it was important to try my best at communicating in Spanish. I found it helpful to bring a pocket sized Spanish-English dictionary.

After finishing with clinic, there was a two hour break for lunch. Usually, all the students in the program would eat at a restaurant located close to our houses. The food was really good here, and quite cheap. I would usually get the menu of the day, which consisted of juice, salad, soup, a main dish and dessert. All of that food was only \$3! The food was also very safe to eat. If there was time after lunch, I would go to a nearby internet café, which cost \$1 every hour.

For the first two weeks of the program, I had Spanish class for four hours at the Andes Spanish School. We would usually go over vocabulary and grammar for the first two hours of class, and then we would just have conversations to practice speaking Spanish for the last two hours. I found having conversations was really helpful. By the last few days of class, speaking in Spanish came naturally to me.

There is only a 30 hour Spanish class requirement, so once I was done with my hours in the first two weeks, I was able to explore the city during my evenings. I really enjoyed going to Mariscal which is the tourist area in Quito. Old Quito is also a great place to go because of the beautiful architecture.

Once Spanish class or the explorations ended, I would return to my home stay for dinner. There would always be salad, soup and the main dish. Dinner was my favorite part of the day; not only did I love trying the Ecuadorian food, but I really enjoyed getting to know Francia better. I learned a lot about her past. We were only allowed to speak in Spanish during dinner, so even though it was difficult to understand each other at times, we still opened up to each other and became close.

If there was any energy left in me after my busy day, I would go out at night to Mariscal for either salsa dancing or using the hip internet café/bar called Papaya Net. Since the trolleys stopped running at night, I would take a taxi instead. Taxis in Ecuador were very cheap, never costing more than \$5. To be safe, I would always take a taxi with other students.