

Final Report
IE3 Fall 2009
CFHI Women's Reproductive Health/Tropical Medicine
Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca Mexico

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What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?

My initial impression of CFHI and the people they have on the ground, in Puerto was that this is a well organized program. All the bases were and have been covered from when I stepped off the plane in Puerto to now, having been here for three weeks. A few things stand out: when I got off the plane, went through customs and collected my bags, there was someone there waiting to drive me to the house I would be staying in and to my host family. This person happened to be my host dad, but I think I just got lucky on that part. Also the orientation to Puerto I received was great. Soledad, the local coordinator and my host mom for the internship was great in showing me the general layout of Puerto in a tour by car, giving me a map and then letting me find the rest out for myself, answering my questions day by day. The schedule for work at clinics given to me by the medical directors has also been very organized with a schedule printed out for the whole ten weeks prior to any work being done.

There is also an aspect of completeness to the program; with the Spanish language and medical lectures I am learning the language; living in Puerto with a host family is getting me immersed in the culture, and learning and working in medical clinics is teaching me the way medicine is practiced in Mexico, all of which were goals of mine before entering the program.

On the subject of the work, it has been a great start these first two weeks; I have been placed in a small rural clinic in a town 40 minutes away by taxi called Copala. The work I have done here has been mostly in



primary care, including being with the doctor on consults and working with him to diagnose a patient, administering antibacterial shots, vaccinations and I.V.s. It has been great for me as a pre med student to actually have a doctor say to me ok, it's your turn, what do you think is the problem? I have had to critically think in these situations, and when I am right (with the diagnosis and the treatment) it is always a nice bonus! I have really enjoyed getting to know the doctor and his assistant (something like an R.N. called an enfermero) and working with all the different patients and cases.

This work does match up with my expectations as I wasn't expecting small clinics to act like hospitals and I knew they would be

limited in resources, but they make very good use of what they do have. As far as my goals, so far it has been great to learn primary care and be helping the doctor to take patient histories, perform exams, diagnose, and treat patients first hand, especially being a pre med student. I have really learned a lot and the program so far has definitely met my goals as far as learning the healthcare system and more about primary medicine in general.

What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

My greatest anxiety was the language and not because I couldn't speak it at all because I could to an extent, but to work in the medical field, a high level communication is needed and I was worrying how language issues could affect what I was going to do in clinic. For that I was anxious and was one of the reasons I went to Puerto a week before the program started to adjust more. However, it has all but evaporated after a couple weeks. I have learned much in the language and it's just easier to speak a language after you have been around the people in the country awhile and hear how they speak and get used to understanding them. It was definitely difficult the first few days, but has gradually gotten easier each week.

Things have shaped up nicely at work over these first four weeks. Being in an undergraduate university, I knew some, but not near all of the aspects of medicine I have seen and learned about while in the clinic here beforehand. The most important of these I wanted to learn and grow in while in Mexico was my knowledge of medicine and how doctors go about their work including how they diagnose and treat patients.

I have also grown in my ability to think like a doctor. Sitting in a fairly large number of cases now and working with the doctor through every case has my mind on that track as a result. It has also been interesting to see how they communicate with their patients and how it changes in style throughout a consult



How are things going relative to your personal goals?

I would say overall I am meeting my personal goals, although before I leave, I would like to push myself even more to get outside the comfort zone and try more new things as there is always more room for personal growth by challenging yourself in new ways.

There have been so many cultural experiences, I could write a lot about this. The experiences that stand out most to me are during the first week of my arrival, I began to notice the general attitude of the Mexican people of the area as being one of a care free nonchalant-ness that is so different from the American way of life, along with their views of self and family. It was definitely eye opening, experiencing this for the first time when I showed up late to my first Spanish class and thought I was going to be reprimanded somehow and when I arrived, the instructor wasn't even there and showed up about ten minutes later and told me "tranquilo" (tranquil or easy going literally, but really it means "it's all good"). I have heard that word a lot since then and have adjusted to it while here as it is how people live.

Describe a day in your life – what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

I get up at either 6 or 7 in the morning depending on whether I'm running or not. I did want to try and keep up a little physical conditioning as I am a fairly fitness minded person in general. Then I'll be returning from my run or just waking up at 7, after which I eat and prepare for my day in clinic which usually starts around 8:30 am depending on the clinic. I then go to clinic almost always by taxi (by bus to one clinic) or by walking if the clinic is close enough. I am usually in clinic until around 1:00 - 1:30 pm, but that changes also depending on the clinic. I have been in clinic until three or four in the afternoon because a surgery went overtime or started late, and have returned even later in the day for a birth. So how long you are in clinic often goes with the opportunities you have.

After clinic I usually have a little free time in which I either relax, have a salsa dance lesson or surf (which I do most often). Then around 4pm I have a Spanish class. I have dinner around 8 every night with my family and this is the time where we get to talk about the day, and anything else that happens to be on our minds, which has ranged to about every topic. After this great time, it's usually not too long after that I'm ready to hit the hay and start the next day. On the weekends it's different as there is no clinic, and in Puerto around this time (in November anyway) it has been just awesome because November is basically a celebration month in Puerto, and I have the privilege of living directly across from the main town square where all of these celebrations take place. Every weekend there are cultural dances or concerts, lasting until 2 in the morning many times (they are also in the weekdays sometimes, which I will admit has made it hard to sleep some nights). Also during the weekends there is more time to do many of the fun things Puerto offers such as surfing, diving/snorkeling, fishing, dance classes, boating tours to see whales, turtles and dolphins, or just a walk on the beach can be quite nice as well.

Managing my time in between work and exploring life in Puerto hasn't been that difficult. It was at first when I didn't feel as comfortable in the language, but after a couple weeks that changed and I became more comfortable living in Puerto and started to find all that it offers. There has always been ample time during the week to explore outside of work and classes, and always a lot to find.



What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

I love my current living situation because it is one big happy family, and I mean big. My actual host family has three members, a mother, father, and a daughter of three years who is quite cute. The property where my family lives is a complex of five houses where much of the extended family on the father's side live. Both my

host parents are surfers and are well connected on the community in general, so it has been great to learn to surf and how to live in Puerto from them. They have an apartment attached to the side of their house where I lived that was nicer than what I was expecting coming into the program so I was very pleased with that. I would say that living with a host family is definitely the way to go in any long term exchange especially if it's your first and you aren't already fluent in the language because it just puts you in the world of the people that live there and you learn faster. I would say to be open to trying new things the family does which will open doors for you in the future. When you talk with your family be open and honest with them about how you are doing and what you are thinking as it builds trust which is a key thing to have with a host family in a foreign country.

How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less than what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

I haven't had to spend that much on food because my host mom always fixes me such a large breakfast it takes me breakfast and lunch to eat it. Knowing where to get cheap good quality food comes with time, although I can say the supermarket in Puerto SuperChe has good prices and is a great place to start for buying extra food, although trying the restaurants in town is a must as well. As far as my actual budget, I spend around 50-70 pesos per week for transportation (mainly taxis), 140 pesos per week for food, 300-350 pesos per week for entertainment (this is mainly because I rented a surfboard for the entire time I have been here for 3000 pesos, but it includes a private lesson every week also). Knowing what I know now, I would ask my host family right when I arrived where to eat, where to go, what to do, and how best to do it then make a list and

plan what and when you can do those things. The host family is a great resource, but you will definitely find plenty out for yourself as you spend more time in an area which is part of the beauty of living there!

Upon reflecting on your internship experience, are you more or less committed to a career in this field? What experiences have contributed to this?



Not only am I more committed to being a doctor after this internship, the desire to use my medical skills abroad after becoming a doctor has increased exponentially. This internship has taught me that there is a real need for healthcare and instruction for the people where I was but also in many other parts of the world.

It's not as if I didn't know there was a need before, I just didn't care about it as much. I thought I would be serving my homeland well by just practicing medicine there, whereas after an internship like this you see there really is greater need in other places which has really made me consider what I will do in the future abroad with medicine after getting the M.D.

The experiences that most contributed to this attitude were just being in the clinics in general – being there and seeing the need both in the instruction and application of medicine- and wanting to do something in response.

Also however, my desire to become a doctor was strengthened because of the things I was able to do in clinic such apply I.V.s, do vaccinations, bodily tests, take vitals, suture wounds, scrub in and assist in surgeries and much more. Most of these things were obviously firsts for me being an undergraduate student so they would naturally influence me one way or another and I think it's safe to say I was heavily influenced towards becoming a doctor from doing those things.