

**Spring 2007 Scholarship Report**  
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**Tropical Medicine and Rural Health on the Coast of Mexico**  
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The clinical experience I gained in Oaxaca was a life changing experience. Not only change me on my personal views on medical care in Mexico but change me as a person who inspires to be a physician near future. Volunteering in various clinics and hospitals helped me to learn and gained knowledge about medicine. I am convinced that this unique experience will shape me into a physician who provides health care services in low-income communities.

Part of my childhood and teenage years, my family and I lived in a community for farm-workers. Migrant camp homes were next to our community and every year I saw families come to live temporarily in those homes to work in the fields. Like my family, I witnessed migrant families delaying to go to the clinic for treatment due to language barriers between doctor and patient. We did not have medical insurance since my father was a farm-worker and there were only a few clinics we could go for medical attention. It was hard for my family to find a family doctor. Not many doctors spoke our language and understood our cultural background. The idea to be a physician came later when I volunteered in clinics in poor and low-income communities.

My desired to pursue a life of service where I can contribute to society by helping others came when I volunteered in a free clinic, Clinica Tepati, for uninsured and underrepresented population in Sacramento for more than two years while studying at the University of California, Davis. I gain valuable experience interacting with patients in the process of greeting, weighing, and checking for vital signs. I listen to patients life stories. Some patients came for medical care at the clinic as a last resource. I translated for patients since the majority of them did not speak English. To better understand the role of a physician, I shadowed and observed them. The doctors took their time to give

proper medical attention. I observed how doctors treated patients with care. From this experience I found my passion for taking care for low-income community families.

Upon graduating from University of California, Davis, I took some time off to explore and learn about both the world and myself. I remembered when I was a child living in Mexico, I witnessed deprived families not getting the medical attention they required. During my visits to Mexico as a young adult, I became aware of the low health care services in rural communities in Mexico. I was interested to explore, learn, and work in clinics in poor and low-income communities to expand my knowledge in medicine. I applied to Child Family Health International program to have an experience in working in underserved communities.

I volunteered in clinics and hospitals in Oaxaca, one of the poorest indigenous states of Mexico. I spent one month going on clinical rotations gaining experience to work and interact with diverse group of people. I gained exposure to many different fields of medicine. I was with pediatricians, general doctors, and surgeons. I triage patients in clinics. In an effort to gain experience in the medical field, I ask patients for their chief complaint, history of present illness, and pass medical history with the support of the doctor. Indigenous families living in remote homes in the mountains walked to the community clinic for medical attention for their sick and malnourished children. Some of them could not pay 15 pesos (\$1.50USD) for the doctor's consult but still they were treated. I observed how the doctor-patient relationship evolved from shyness to trust. The enjoyment and enthusiasm that doctors displayed while treating their patients was an experience that I enjoyed watching them having fun. The satisfaction I gained by noting a patient appreciation gave me a deep fulfillment to one day become a physician. I gained cultural knowledge. I witness in-patient surgeries procedures and participated in out-patient treatment. During my experience in hospitals, I was thrilled to witness my first group reunion of specialty doctors discussing about a patient status. Each of the doctors gave their own perspective in their own field of expertise about the patient's condition. At the end of the program, the insight I gained on issues of International health and underserved communities in Mexico has helped me to understand more about medicine.

Health services in Mexico cost a lot of money for people who do not have medical insurance. About 40 million out of 100 million people living in Mexico mostly agricultural workers, retailers, craftsmen, etc do not have health insurance. The programs to help the uninsured population with primary medical care such as Extension of Coverage for rural communities and Oportunidades which purpose is to improve of the lives with healthcare, alimentation, and education has improved somewhat the lives of low-income population. The secretaria de Salud de la Nacion has provided partial health care services to the uninsured population. The lack of infrastructure in remote communities and doctors who are not interested to provide medical services in remote rural areas has challenge the government to provide medical care to everyone. In Oaxaca the demand for medical care is arising due to few clinics and hospitals available for the population. In 2001, the program Seguro Popular emerged to help the poor people cover partial or all doctor's consults and medication cost. Common diseases in Puerto

Escondido are malaria, dengue, diarrheas, dermatology, and other diseases that are not given proper attention due to cost are changes, pulmonary tuberculosis, and lepra.

Child Family Health International program has given me an opportunity to improve my medical education by witnessing and observing physicians in clinics, has motivated me to someday work in low-income communities, and most importantly I gained cultural knowledge. Dr. Javier Pastrana medical director and Soledad Fernandez local coordinator supported me to have a great experience in the clinics and Spanish classes. I enjoyed this experienced and hopefully near in the future I can have another experience in another country. Thank you.