

Lindsey Minnema
Full Scholarship Recipient
Andean Health in Quito, Ecuador
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I thought that I knew what to expect, I thought that I would be prepared. I read all the “culture shock” books, all the, “what to do”, “where to go” travel books about Ecuador, but when it came down to it, I didn’t know. I wasn’t even close. Ecuador is a small country, but packed with variety and diversity. I quickly found out that the amount of things that you can do and see there are endless. My experience in Ecuador is one that I will remember forever.

I chose the Andean health program in Quito, Ecuador. The clinical experience was great. I worked in a variety of settings. Every week I would rotate from a different hospital or clinic. The clinics that I worked in ranged from inner city to countryside clinics. The patient population also varied. In the countryside I saw more of the indigenous culture mixed with the local population as well. In the inner city clinics I saw patients from the lowest socioeconomic classes to mid-upper range socioeconomic class. I thought that it was a very good experience to rotate from the different hospitals because it allowed me to view the differences between the two. Not only did I view the differences between the patients, but also between the approaches of the doctors, their interactions with the patients, and their methods of treatment.

Working at the clinics I was expecting to see all sorts of unusual diseases, but to my surprise I wasn’t exposed to a lot of them. I saw many of the same health issues that I do in the United States like: Hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and viral upper respiratory infections. Most of the treatment was the same, however the names of the medications were different. I was quite astounded by what I saw when I worked in the adolescent clinic. I saw numerous young teens pregnant or postpartum returning to clinic for either their prenatal check-up or for their newborns well child visit. It was very disheartening because they were children coming in with their children for checkups. There seemed to be a lack of knowledge about sex education and preventive measures. To many of these teens it seemed to be the norm. They lived at home with their parents, they didn’t work, and a large number of them didn’t attend school.

One of my fondest memories of clinic was my opportunity to visit an alternative medicine clinic in a city north of Quito. The city of Otavalo has a large indigenous population. The clinic combines natural medicine with western medicine. While there, I had the pleasure of meeting a shaman, or yachak as they refer to them as. He showed us his room full of herbs and even prepared an antidote for us while

we were in the room. Later we were able to observe the fregador and partera, other health care providers , perform their patient encounters. They use a variety of different tools during their visits like eggs, rocks, and oil to heal and “clean” their patients of their “bad energy”. It was very interesting to see their different beliefs in practice especially because they are so different from our medicine.

The homestay experience was equally as outstanding. The family was so nice and provided delicious meals and good conversation. The home that I stayed at also hosted other students as well so it was nice to converse with them at the end of the day. In the evening we would practice our Spanish and talk about our day over dinner, where we worked, what we saw. After dinner we would usually continue our conversations, play card games, or even show our pictures of our family and friends from back home. The language school was great. They have a wonderful group of Spanish teachers. They are all very nice and eager for us to learn. Classes ranged from group to one-on-one classes. I learned a lot during them, I wish I could have had more time. After class or before depending, we would do extracurricular activities like cooking classes or tours of different parts of the city. I learned how to make ceviche and llapingachos, some typical dishes.

Another very enjoyable part of this program was just being in Ecuador and being able to experience the culture. On the weekends, all of us students planned weekend excursions. We were able to view a great deal of Ecuador. We climbed a volcano, went to the jungle where we went white water rafting, and we even had the opportunity to visit an indigenous village. We met a family and went up into their home to see what their lifestyle was like. It was very amazing to see how the people lived and functioned day to day. All of the people in Ecuador I found to be very nice and hospitable.

Over all, I had the time of my life. I got to experience things that I will probably never get to do again. I got to see health care from a different perspective. I got to meet people from around the world and I have made new friendships that I intend to keep for the time to come. I have been involved in service learning and international travel. This experience has sparked my interest to continue practicing and serving others in other countries around the world. I am blessed for such a memorable experience. Thank you CFHI for allowing me this great opportunity.