

**Medical Student Enrichment Program**

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine

**Clinical Elective:** Trujillo, Peru—Hospital de Alta Complejidad

**Dates of Training:** February 1, 2020 to February 29, 2020

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**Date of Reflection:** March 12, 2020

When I first arrived at the Hospital de Alta Complejidad (Hospital of High Complexity) I found it was the most familiar looking building I had seen since I landed in Peru. As the biggest hospital in the state (La Libertad), patients from all over the Northern region of Peru visit this hospital to receive their care. The hospital had all specialists available, the intensive care units were well-equipped, and there was an abundance of diagnostic tools at the disposal of the medical staff.



Despite the similarities of the hospitals, I quickly realized the medical landscape was very different in Peru. I spent my time on the inpatient Infectious Diseases service. Here I saw my first case of tuberculosis, a patient with invasive aspergillosis, and a patient suffering from both dengue and leptospirosis. We had all the resources available for diagnosing and treating these patients at the facility, but there were definitely obstacles to getting certain tasks done. All requests for imaging and labs had to be hand delivered by the physician or residents, and at times certain tests could not be scheduled for days. One interesting challenge during my time at the hospital was when the facility ran out of blood culture test tubes. This posed a challenge for our service as many patients were septic and we relied on these tests to monitor their progression.

Even with these differences, some of the procedures remained similar to my experience in the United States. Every morning we would spend time answering antibiotic questions for different services in order to promote antibiotic stewardship. This contrasted with the fact that antibiotics are able to be purchased over the counter in pharmacies in Peru, leading to a

significant amount of antibiotic resistance. The physicians I worked with recounted their experiences of trying to educate patients on the proper use of antibiotics to avoid unnecessary use in the community.

Outside of the hospital, I continued to learn about the health system in Peru and important issues concerning the health in Peru. In the afternoons, I took medical Spanish courses. These classes, taught by doctors, not only equipped us with helpful medical terminology and phrases, but provided a time to ask questions about medicine in Peru. It was here that I learned about important public health problems, such as the high burden of anemia in the country and how closely it was connected to nutrition and food security.

One of the most rewarding experiences of the month was participation in a weekly “health campaign” which provided free healthcare consultations to the community. The environment was usually busy and chaotic; we would see over 50 patients in a morning at the local municipality building. At times, it almost felt



impossible; we were trying to

listen to a patient in a loud room while they were speaking a language I was actively learning. Furthermore, we had limited resources in terms of diagnostic tools and therapeutic medications for the problems our patient presented with. However, these campaigns reemphasized a skill that has been stressed throughout my medical school experience: the importance of the patient-physician relationship. Many times, all we could do was listen, but despite this, every patient would express gratitude.



In my free time, I enjoyed exploring a new culture with fellow medical students from the United States and other European countries. By living with a host mother, I was able to experience the daily lifestyle in a local neighborhood. She introduced me and my roommates to a variety of traditional dishes, such as Chifa (the Peruvian take on Chinese food) and ceviche. One of my favorite experiences was visiting Huaca de la luna y sol, a ruins site of the Moche (the predecessors of the Incas) just miles from Trujillo. Peru is a beautiful country with a diverse landscape, population, and rich culture. I will always look fondly on the experience I had visiting this vibrant country.



*Allie Khodadadi*