

Medical Student Enrichment Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Lima, Peru – Cayetano Heredia University

Dates of Training: February 2, 2020- March 1, 2020

Student: Carter Boyd, MS4

Date of Reflection: March 5, 2020



It was an especially arid Wednesday morning in the surgery pavilion at Arzobispo Loayza National Hospital—an oasis of flush green and tranquility amidst the noisy concrete jungle that lie outside its walls in the center of Lima, Peru. As the sweat rolled down my back, I had to pay special attention to the residents I was working with to hear and understand their instructions delivered in Spanish over the persistent chirping of birds through the open windows of the surgical ward. “For this patient, bed 17, remove her dressings and get her nice and cleaned up. Then, I want you to rub sugar into the wounds, and then we will replace the bandages,” the resident told me. Though confident in my Spanish communication abilities, I figured I must have misheard her through the hustle and rumblings of the pavilion—a single room with 40 patients’ beds

squeezed closely next to one another and each bed occupied with a patient recovering from his or her recent operation. “Sugar?” I questioned, simultaneously doubting my comprehension and her medical knowledge. She nodded her head and helped me remove the dressings that covered the patient’s wounds. She poured a large quantity of pure cane sugar onto my gloved hands and watched as I smoothed the sugar across the patient’s wounds coating every exposed surface. So many questions raced through my mind all at once. Why sugar? How does it work? I’ve never seen this before. Maybe I just don’t understand...maybe I misheard. Later in the day, I asked the resident as to why we used sugar. She looked confused and responded, “It’s for wound healing.”

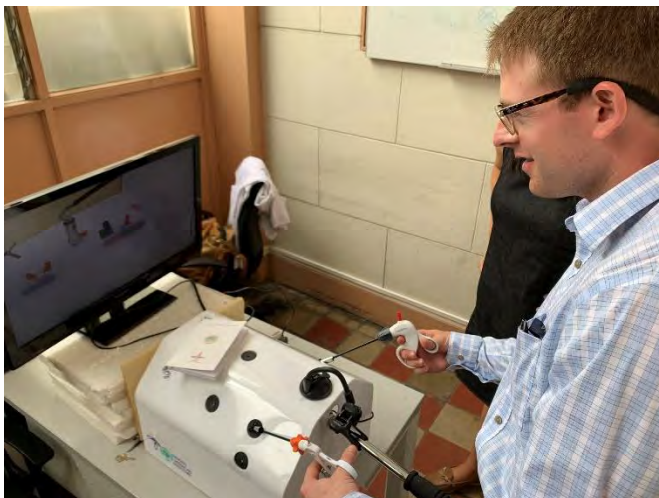




This was just one example of many in which I felt a disconnect between what I knew and had learned in my medical training in the United States and how I saw medicine was being practiced at a national safety-net public hospital in Lima with limited resources serving the uninsured population. Initially, I thought that their system was antiquated, but then realized that they very much knew and taught their students and residents of the 'standards of care' but due to a paucity of resources had to utilize other options to continue to care for and heal their patients. I reached out to a mentor of mine at UAB who is a world expert on wound healing. I relayed to him this seemingly crazy experience I had, only to be humbled when he explained that the application of sugar to healing wounds is a very effective and age-old wound healing treatment regimen. This experience changed the lens through which I viewed the rest of

my time and enabled me to more completely engage with the patients, physicians, and students learning from each patient encounter and operation.

Daily experience at the hospital entailed morning rounds followed by clinic or surgery depending on the day or surgeon that I was assigned to that day. I attended and participated in daily noon conferences mainly discussing topics relevant to a basic general surgery curriculum. Clinic days were particularly interesting as I had the opportunity to interact on an individual basis with patients. Given the hospital we were at, patients traveled from the jungles, mountains and deserts of Peru to seek care at our hospital. Diseases I had only previously learned about in microbiology were the chief complaints of a multitude of patients presenting to our clinic seeking surgical management and care. The most rewarding part of the



experience was being the recipient of the abundant gratitude, joy, and smiles from the patients as part of the surgical team. I was thankful for the opportunity to grow my Spanish vocabulary and conversation abilities particularly in the medical sphere.



Outside of clinical duties during the week, my site partner Zach and I took time to explore the incredible city of Lima including the cuisine, culture, soccer games, architecture, and history. We were also extremely fortunate to travel to Cuzco and see many ancient ruins of the Incans including one of the Seven Wonders of the World, Machu Picchu. Accompanying all these experiences, I had the opportunity to meet so many amazing and generous people whose friendships I now cherish.

I am incredibly thankful to the Office of International Medical Education at UAB for providing me with this tremendous opportunity to supplement my medical school education with a hands-on experience abroad. Expanding my medical horizons to an international stage has provided me with a more complete perspective of healthcare and

helped reinvigorate my passion of caring for the underserved. I will be a better physician because of this experience.

Carter Boyd

