

Medical Student Enrichment Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Trujillo, Peru – Hospital de Alta Complejidad

Dates of Training: February 11, 2019 to March 8, 2019

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Date of Reflection: March 20, 2019

We set out around 8 o'clock on a Friday morning for our site, in a square in the middle of our city, Trujillo, Peru. When we arrived for our clinic day, the tents were all set up to protect everyone from the relentless sun, but people were still scurrying around, getting things ready. Some of the site organizers quickly gathered a few out of our group to hop in a truck, drive about a mile away to a local school, and rush in to borrow more tables and chairs for the event. By the time we returned to get everything set up and ready to go, there were almost 100 local Peruvians already waiting to be seen by our team of American and European medical students, physician



assistants, residents, and Peruvian doctors. This was one of our *health campaigns*: a day when our group, led by two or three Peruvian doctors, went out into local communities to set up half-day primary care clinics to evaluate and treat patients with a variety of illnesses. We scrambled to our respective areas: triage, medical tents, and pharmacy to get started. This was why we had come here.

That day's health campaign was one of our busiest and most chaotic. There were 150 patients who received tickets to be seen, but there were some others who just walked up off the streets asking to be seen without signing in as well. It was somewhat crowded, a little disorganized, and loud. As part of the event, there were performances of local dance going on nearby our tents. There was a vaccination tent beside ours, with a long line of people getting Hepatitis vaccines, flu vaccines, and more. There was a pop-up hair salon 50 feet from us with volunteers providing haircuts and styling. There were kids running around, sometimes in and out of our medical tents, unsupervised. With all of this going on, we had to focus on our patients and listen intently to them—in Spanish. This was a Spanish immersion program, so there were no interpreters for us. That day, full of commotion, distractions, and a lot of yelling, was actually one of the days when



I learned the most during my entire trip: about medicine, the Spanish language, and the Peruvian culture. We saw many patients (although well short of our 150 total), allowing for ample medical experience. We were forced to listen, speak, ask, ask again, wait for the noise to die down and then clarify (whatever it took) to figure out our patient's problem and decide on the best treatment. Finally, we experienced many parts of Peruvian culture, from our patients and their illnesses, to the myriad of activities around us. That day, we left feeling like Peruvian doctors.

I set out for Peru seeking to deepen my understanding of medicine, language, and culture. Health campaigns provided one of the best learning opportunities for this while I was in Peru. Fortunately, there were many other opportunities to grow in these areas too. For development of medical knowledge, I spent the mornings of my weekdays in an infectious disease rotation where I saw cutaneous leishmaniasis, AIDS with metastatic lymphoma, cholangitis, and more. I also experienced a different hospital setting and healthcare system than which I was accustomed.

My weekday afternoons were spent in the classroom, learning conversational and medical Spanish at our Spanish school with other students from around the world. I spent free time exploring the city of Trujillo and other areas of Peru, learning about the food, the people, and the way of life. In Peru, I saw my first tuberculosis patient, saw leishmaniasis for the first time, evaluated many patients without a word of English, ate delicious Peruvian meals and had great conversation with an amazing local housemother. I also petted a llama, tasted alpaca, explored Macchu Picchu, hiked to a lake with an elevation of 15,000 feet, learned to dance salsa, watched a local professional soccer game, met some incredible Peruvian people, and much more. Our health campaigns were one of my most beneficial and most cherished experiences in Peru, and they serve as a great example of what I was able to learn about medicine, language, and culture while there. At the same time, they are only a small part of what was a much bigger, challenging, fulfilling, and life-changing experience.



David Osula