

Recognition of Distinction in Global Health

University of Alabama at Birmingham Heersink School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo (INTEC)**Date of Training:** June 8, 2025 – July 5, 2025**Student:** Jacob Nydegger**Date of Reflection:** August 30, 2025

It was Saturday morning, and we were about to get picked up by Victor who was taking us to the airport to return home to Alabama. I was full of emotions: gratitude, joy, sadness and more. I'm not sure how I expected to feel in that moment, but what I was thinking about was the people. What made this experience so amazing for me were the amazing people that we got to be with and work with during our time. I will never be able to thank everyone enough for the impact they have had on me, and I left that trip with friendships that I will cherish forever. That being said, I think the best way to share about my experience in the Dominican Republic is to share about experiences I have had with some of those wonderful people.



Abner, Maria Jose, Anabel, and Miguel are the INTEC students that Zeetee and I were with in our rural clinic in Baní. I had no idea what to expect, but those four

were some of my best friends in the Dominican Republic. They helped learn how to be confident in our manual blood pressure taking skills, even when we were taking blood pressure out in the streets with motorcycles zooming by making it hard to hear. I can still hear everyone laughing as we got a lesson on the most common slang words used in Dominican Spanish. Anabel was patient and helped me take patient histories in Spanish, which I was so grateful for because the Spanish in the Dominican Republic was a lot harder for me to understand than I expected. Maria Jose and Anabel taught us to play dominoes, a popular game in the country, and we drove with Miguel and Abner to the

beach. These four students embraced us. Their friendships are something that will be present throughout my life. I will be a better physician because they taught me the importance of working together and getting along with your team.



Dr. Miches is the surgeon I spent most of my time with during my surgical rotation at the Hospital Marcelino Velez. To be honest, the first couple days of my surgical rotation were not the best. I learned

of inefficiencies in the healthcare system as patients lined the hospital halls, but there was no doctor in clinic to see them because they were busy somewhere else in the hospital. My surgery rotation became so much better when we spent three consecutive days in the OR with Dr. Miches. Before performing a thyroidectomy, he pulled us aside and taught us about the thyroid gland and quizzed us on its physiological role. His attention to detail throughout surgery showed me the importance of doing what is best for the patient, even if it takes a little longer in the long run.

Lisbel was the INTEC student I was with in the Hospital Infantil Robert Reid Cabral, the pediatric hospital in Santo Domingo. I absolutely loved my time in the pediatric hospital. My eyes were really opened to the lack of resources and some of the difficult political situations in the country. In pulmonary clinic, I got to work with all the kids. Giving them stickers was my favorite; they would get so excited.



We spent part of a morning in the fibrosis clinic, but it was awkward space wise. The physician was in the room with a patient, and I was standing in the corner next to a pile of crates and boxes. It was shocking to me that there was nowhere else in the entire hospital to store these things other than the exam room. In the neonatal ICU, I got to learn about how to tell the level of jaundice in a baby. While I was there, a pediatric ophthalmologist came in to do an exam on one of the infants. I was so excited because that is a big interest of mine. While it was extremely sad, in the emergency room I helped remove some maggots that had infected the scalp of a child. We were sent to do that with only medical students, I wasn't sure where the physicians went, but it was a good learning experience seeing how a team of medical students could work together. Lastly, in urgent care it was eye opening to learn that a parent couldn't accompany their child

while they received care due to fear of deportation. I had heard a little bit about that complex situation between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, but that experience really opened my eyes. I can only imagine how hard it was for that parent not to be there. These weren't even all the experiences that I had in my pediatric hospital, but it was because of Lisbel that I got to experience so many different things. She worked hard to make sure I would get to experience a variety of things, and she taught me the importance of putting others before yourself in medical service.

While I could go on and on about different people from my time in the Dominican Republic, there is one more group I need to talk



about, and that is Zeetee, Divya, Akhila, and Ashley, my fellow UAB classmates that I spent every day with for my entire time there. I didn't really know any of them prior to our elective, but I am forever grateful that they were who I got to spend it with. I learned so much from them and consider them some of my very best friends in medical school. I had my birthday while we were there, and they put so much effort into making the best birthday celebration for me. I appreciated it more than they know. I have the utmost of admiration for them.

When I look back on my experience in the Dominican Republic, I will remember the immense number of lessons and experiences I gained. I am forever grateful for those, and I can confidently say that I am a better person and will be a better physician because of my time there. However, what I will remember even more are the amazing people that made those experiences and lessons possible. So, Abner, Anabel, Miguel, Maria Jose, Dr. Miches, Lisbel, Divya, Ashley, Ahkila, Zeetee, and so many more, I want to say thank you. You have made me a better person and I am so grateful to have friendships with you.

Jacob Nydegger