

CFHI Bolivia
Summer 2014
Final Report

What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?

I think the organization of this program is great so far. Karina and Fabricio made sure we all got to our host families and they make sure we know where we need to go each week for clinic. For example, which bus we need to take and where and when to get off and how much money we need and what the doctors are like. My initial impression of the first clinic I went to, Villa Avaroa, was that it is incredibly small, dirty, cold, and crowded. This clinic has a Pediatrician and a Gynecologist at it so I spent time with both of these doctors. At first I was with the Gynecologist and we saw a ton of pregnant women and I saw about twenty women get contraceptives implanted in their arms. With the pediatrician there were many babies with colds and ear infections and a few with Chagas disease. The work is what I expected, but the environment is worse than I expected.

What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?

I was shocked by how nice my host family's house is and that they have wifi. I was also surprised by how clean Tarija is compared to other cities I've been to, such as San Juan, Costa Rica. I was also shocked that we boarded the airplane from La Paz to Tarija outside. We walked up the steps that extend down from the side of the plane in the front and the back. So far Bolivia is greatly exceeding my expectations.

What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

My greatest anxiety was how my host family would be and how hard it would be to communicate with the language barrier, but now I am not worried at all. My host family is extremely nice and takes very good care of me. Carmen washes my clothes every day and we always eat almuerzo (lunch) together at 1pm every day. It is the main course here, which is really nice and in the afternoon we have tea or coffee and some kind of smaller meal. My host mother makes me feel very at home and I feel very safe and comfortable at this house. My host sister is really awesome, she teaches a zumba class that we go to 3 times a week and my host dad is really funny, he likes soccer and tennis so its fun to talk about those things with him and watch games together.

How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?

I am becoming more adaptable, braver, and better at Spanish, which were three of my

personal goals. I can still expand on all of these. I think I need to talk more in Spanish to really keep improving and meet my goal of becoming fluent. Were going to Uyuni this weekend and its -20 Celsius and there are supposed to be road blocks so I think this weekend is going to be a good test of my adaptability, but we will see.

How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

Things are going well in this area. I can take any Micro, Trufi, or Taxi. I know my way around Tarija pretty well although I did get lost today and missed my rotation. I go to a local gym here which is nice. It's really small, but it's fun and I take zumba classes there. It stood out to me when we went to a club this past weekend with our host sister and there were people smoking inside. I want to hike up to the Coimata waterfall before we leave Tarija!

Describe a day in your life – what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

A day in the life at work is that I wake up at about 7am to go to an 8 or 9 am rotation. I show up to whatever place I am scheduled to work at that week. Every day is something different; some days we do rounds, or consults, or some days we do both. Some days I am in surgery and one day I did an overnight rotation in the emergency room. After work I go home and we always eat lunch at 1pm. Then it is siesta time where I nap or do homework. Then is Spanish class for two hours, or volunteering depending on the week and these usually end at 5pm. Then I am free to do whatever I want: shop, go out to eat, workout, do homework, watch movies etc. On the weekends I like to travel or go out with my host sister and brother and spend time with my family. I balance my time pretty well and get enough sleep by dedicating one afternoon a week to getting all my stuff done so I can do whatever I want the other 6 days.

Housing: What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

Housing situation is fantastic. I loved my family in Tarija so much and now I am in La Paz and my family here is very nice too. I have only been here 4 days so we aren't 100% comfortable with each other yet. I have hot water both places and I had wifi in Tarija. The food in Bolivia is fantastic and I wouldn't have chosen anything else. Advice I would say is ask your host family if they want to do things with you or if you can do things with them because it makes you closer and is an overall better experience that way. On our last night in Tarija we made home made sushi and it was extremely fun and the best way to end an incredible experience there.

Finance: How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less than what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc.? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

My budget is good. I have spent as much as I thought I would, but I haven't gone to Coroico, biking the death road, or Lago Titicaca yet. I spent about \$150 on my trip to Salar de Uyuni, including a day in Potosi. Food is very cheap, I spend more here in la Paz because you have to buy coffee or food to get wifi at a café, in Tarija I spent practically no money on food; maybe \$50 in 5 weeks. We went to the movie theatre once and got our nails done and I bought Karpil every day in Tarija, which is the juice in a bag and its one Boliviano and is super healthy and delicious. Recreation didn't cost much. Maybe \$20 in 5 weeks and I probably spent \$50 shopping.

Travel and Transportation: How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice? Would you recommend other options? Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off? How do you manage that? What do you recommend for travel options? Where do you recommend exploring?

I walk everywhere or take a microbus, which is 1 boliviano. It is super easy and cheap. Taxis are also very cheap and a better option late at night if you're a girl. On my time off we always go to the markets, or restaurants, Salar de Uyuni, Potosi, San Lorenzo and we hiked to a waterfall outside town last weekend called Coimata, I would recommend this. I learned all these places to go from my host family, which is why it is very important to communicate with them and build a good relationship with them because they will make your experience much better!

Professional: How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?

My coursework prepared me very well for this internship. Anatomy, especially, helped me a lot and my class that taught me how to use a stethoscope and take blood pressure. I think knowing all the body parts and how they work so that you can communicate with the doctors is the most crucial aspect to be successful in an internship like this.

Cross Cultural: Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences? What did you do? What would you do next time?

This was really sad, this past week there was a 2-year-old baby with cancer in his eye. Since he is under 5 years old he can receive free health care treatment from the government, but the mom refused to get him treatment. She is from Potosi and this baby isn't the son of her current husband so the husband said she couldn't treat him or stay here in La Paz with him. So the mom signed papers saying that she knows the baby is going to suffer and die within 2 months and she could get treatment but doesn't want to. It was so sad and the doctors couldn't do anything about it. The woman is an indigenous person to Bolivia, either Quechua or Aymara I'm not positive, and in their culture the husband is very sexist and possessive and the women do whatever the men say. So in this

case the mom refused treatment because her husband wouldn't let her treat her child because he isn't his child.

There was another case of a girl with a very rare disease and she is 13 years old and her mom, also indigenous, also refused her treatment because it was too expensive. But the hospital is treating her anyways against the will of the mother. I don't understand why the hospital is treating this girl and not the baby with cancer. Especially since he is under 5 and his treatment is free. It could be because the girl will die immediately without treatment, since she is on a respirator. I couldn't do anything about it and I asked one of the doctors who specializes in maltreatment of children why he couldn't do anything for the baby. For example, why couldn't they treat him anyways and take him away from his mom and then put him up for adoption or take him to an orphanage somewhere. He told me they don't have a program for adoption here and that you legally can't take a child from his mother even if she is mistreating him. It is all very confusing and I am researching it, but it was just culturally shocking to see a mom condemn her baby to death because her husband says so, even though she could easily treat him for free. I couldn't do anything about it, but I want to make brochures to hand out to parents to explain how treatment works and how you can pay for it, etc... so that hopefully there won't be more cases like this one.

Personal: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?

I have learned that I like medicine and I like working in a team of people to help someone. I kind of already knew this part, but I also see how much I love learning in a hands on environment. I could work all day and be happy as a clam at the hospital, but I dislike learning in a classroom. I have also learned the importance of asking questions, being open minded and trying new things, because it is key to getting the doctors and advisors here to help you and like you and enjoy your presence instead of seeing you as an annoyance. I notice the more I talk to people and open up, the more they do the same thing. Also, I learned how much I love travelling. A lot of interns are ready to go home and I think I could stay here for a whole year if I had enough money, especially since now I am almost fluent in the language. I love the different culture and the new things to do and places to see. I also love how cheap everything is here.

Identify 3-4 accomplishments or successes in your internship of which you are most proud. These can be professional, personal, or cross-cultural. Explain briefly.

My biggest accomplishment is becoming fluent in Spanish. From how little I spoke when I arrived to how well I speak now, such a drastic difference is amazing. Another accomplishment is my ability to live, work, and travel in this country. I have learned so much about how to get around and go do things safely and without being scared or simply not knowing how because of the language barrier. Also, being able to talk with the doctors creates a lot more opportunities and chances for me to get involved rather than just watch and listen the whole time. I also think I have realized how much I

appreciate living in the United States and having access to modern medicine, clean water, and having standards of sanitation.

After identifying 3-4, pick two of these and expand on them with the following:

- **Outline the context of the situation**
- **Describe any challenges you faced**
- **Describe the actions you took to overcome the challenges**

Speaking Spanish: At first it was very difficult to communicate with my family and the doctors because I couldn't speak Spanish that well and it got really frustrating at times. For example, when I got lost one time the first week and had to call my host mom and tell her where I was it was very difficult and I was very scared. Luckily she understands a little bit of English and between my Spanish and her English we figured it out, but it was one of the most challenging, frantic situations because I was in a bad area of town and just wished I could call my parents to come get me, but I couldn't. I also didn't have any money on me to take a taxi back to my house either. However, had I got myself into that situation now I would be fine. I would just call my host mom or the program coordinator or take a micro home. I also always have money with me now in case something like that happens I can call a taxi or take a micro. Everything just becomes so much easier when you can speak the language.

Live, work, and travel: There were some things I had to get used to, like not putting toilet paper in the toilet. Also people are always late in Bolivia. If they say something is starting at 9, then it is probably starting at 9:30 so I have gotten used to being 15 minutes late everywhere, which is going to be hard to readjust to when I get back to the states. It was also hard to work with the doctors at first because I had to learn all the medical terminology and how they do things. It was weird at first because there is no privacy here. They don't have the HIPPA law obviously and the doctors talk about patients to other patients. Travelling and staying in hostels is different here. Its super cheap and you never know if it's going to be super dirty or your bus is going to take 15 hours or 8 hours. Our bus when we came home from Sucre got stuck in the mud for 3 hours at 4 am. I have no idea how we got into that situation, but it was miserable and freezing. Other bus rides have been delightful, so it just depends. I always prepare myself for the worst. Also, the restaurants, hospitals, and hostels never have toilet paper or soap, so I bring hand sanitizer and baby wipes everywhere I go. It was just a matter of getting used to these things and preparing myself for them. Now I usually don't have any problems.

Describe the workplace culture at your host organization. How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization.

It is dirty at the hospital, no privacy, and there are many stories like the story I talked about before about the baby with cancer whose mom refused him treatment. These were all a little bit of a culture shock for me. I expected it to be dirty, but I didn't realize how many bad parents there were going to be and the lack of privacy. I have adjusted though and I am very grateful to live in the United States and I am glad we have rules about privacy and sanitation.

What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?

Words of advice to future interns. Bring a warm jacket with pockets on the inside to hide your money and phones and keys if you are going during the summer (winter in Bolivia). It gets very cold in the winter here (my down jacket has been perfect). My money belt has been very useful as well so I recommend bringing that. Bring very comfy shoes to work in, for example I brought hush puppies and they were perfect (most girls at the hospital wear boots or crocs and guys wear dress shoes). Bring crisp dollars that aren't ripped to exchange for Bolivianos or for the visa. They do not accept ripped bills. Bring shorts because it gets warm during the days sometimes, especially in Tarija. Bring an outfit you can go out in and an outfit to go to family events or church. Bring lots of hand sanitizer, hiking (adventure) shoes, warm socks, a blanket, and a backpack or small duffel for weekend trips. Bring more than one copy of your passport, 3 would be good. Traveler's checks are useless, and bring a backup credit card (I brought a debit and credit card and \$500 cash and haven't had any problems). Bring a notebook for Spanish class. Bringing granola bars is a good idea and a durable water bottle that you can refill (my hydro flask has been very useful). Bring gloves and a hat and scarves so you don't have to buy them here. Bring lots of pairs of contacts and contact solution if you wear them because the climate is very dry here and contacts get ruined easily. Bring shower shoes like flip-flops or something for when you travel. Bring a towel you don't care about and can just throw away at the end and don't have to bring back so you will have more space for souvenirs. Bring all your medication for diarrhea, altitude sickness, motion sickness, Advil, cold and flu, malaria, etc. Don't over pack. I wear the same 2 pairs of pants to the hospital every day and only brought one pair of jeans and 4 pairs of leggings because they are small and light and I can wear them anywhere (obviously guys need to bring more pairs of pants).

As far as cultural advice, everyone is different and is going to adjust differently. I would just say really work on your Spanish and talk to your host family a lot because that is the best way to learn. Also, ask the doctors lots of questions because that is how they open up to you and let you do more stuff and they will like you more. Do stuff with your host family like cook, go to the movies, and invite your host siblings places with you and other interns. These are the best ways to get immersed in the culture and learn the language and have the best experience.