

Child Family Health International Bolivia: Pediatric Health (La Paz / Tarija)
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 am very impressed with the organization as of this week. Karina and Fabricio are wonderful. They are very helpful and they made sure everything was organized and laid out for us so that understanding what we needed to do was easy. The rotations are good so far as well. So far I have not done too much, but that is because I am observing consultations. I expected there to be more of a variety of cases, however, the majority of what I am seeing is similar to what I would see in the US (coughs and colds). These rotations, although they have just started and they are similar to the cases I would see in the US, are very helpful and this is a wonderful experience. One of my goals was to simply gain more clinical experience. This is definitely helping me reach my goals.

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

I was most worried about the culture shock coming to Bolivia. I somewhat expected minimal amenities and a small, shack-like house. I also expected the food to be very odd and sometimes gross. I was pleasantly surprised with both things. I am in a beautiful house with a beautiful, nice room and an excellent family. I have plenty of amenities and my house even has WiFi. I love all of the food I eat, and most is very normal, like something I would eat in the US.

How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? What would you like to achieve in the next half of your internship?

Well, I haven't yet hit halfway, but the rest of my internship I would like to improve my Spanish. I don't have many goals necessarily, I just want to see and experience a lot and learn as much as possible.

So far my rotations are going pretty well. I did not enjoy the rotation at the mental hospital, Intraid. This was simply because I am not looking to go into mental health. My goals to learn and witness a lot have somewhat been met so far. I have seen several children in different situations that have shown me that the health care here is not what it is in the US. Sadly, I have not seen as many pediatric cases as I had wished. This will hopefully change in La Paz.

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?

My personal goals are nearly the same as my professional goals. I need to improve my Spanish and I also want to try new things, explore and have fun. I have tried quite a few new things, including food, but I still want to explore more. I want to go to Uyuni and Lake Titicaca and try a bunch of new foods.

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?

I have experienced several things that are different in Bolivian culture than in American culture. How people speak to elders is different and very respectful. Using the usted form or using “Don” or “Doña” is very kind and everyone uses it. Greetings also stand out. Everyone gives a half hug and does a one sided cheek kiss. I still want to witness a lot regarding the culture, but so far my cross-cultural goals have been met.

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?

During weekdays, I wake up, get ready, eat breakfast (cereal, bread, fruit or whatever we had in the house) and leave my house at around 7:30, depending on the rotation. Some are further, some start at different times, but my house was in the middle of a lot of things, so I was able to get places quickly. Most rotations started at 8:00. I would either walk or take a micro. Walking to most places in the city is really easy, but the micro in Tarija is easy too. Work typically goes until 12:00, but with some rotations and depending on the day, we would get out early. After work I would go home and lunch with the family would be at 1:00. Lunch was amazing every single day.

The first 2 weeks I took Spanish classes. I would walk to Spanish class at 2:45 and class would be from 3:00 to 5:00. The last 3 weeks I volunteered at an after school program for kids during roughly the same times as Spanish. After Spanish or volunteering I would either go explore shops around town with other students, hang out at a restaurant in the plaza that had wifi (our spot was XOXO), or go home and hang out with the family. Some nights I would go to Zumba classes, which were taught by my host sister. Depending on what we did for the night, we had dinner anywhere from 6:00 to 9:30. This consisted of different things nightly. Sometimes pizza, ham and cheese sandwiches, or PB&Js, always bread and jelly or Dulce de Leche, coffee, tea, and whatever else we wanted.

It was tough balancing everything because I had to write a bunch of essays for medical school applications, but I found time at night or would sometimes miss out on things.

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.

My housing situation in Tarija was incredible. I was with a fantastic family who included me in everything and made me feel very welcome. I would not choose anything else. They had the best food and would buy me any other foods I wanted. I had my own room and my roommate had her own little house type thing separate from the main house. It was an amazing experience.

Finances: 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?

I didn't really know what to expect when it came to finances, but everything here is very cheap compared to in the US. Food is cheap and little souvenirs are cheap too. Travel is more expensive, but, again, compared to the US, it is very cheap. In my 5 weeks in Tarija I probably spent around \$300. Most of that came from my trip to the salt flats in Uyuni because all of the travel and the problems we ran into.

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?

To get to work I either walk or take a micro. Micros are small busses that you hop on whenever and wherever you see them. They cost 1 Boliviano (Bs), which is about \$0.15. For us students it does NOT cost 1.50 Bs, although if you do not give exact change, that is what they charge you. One rotation I had to take a micro for about 15 minutes and then take a trufi for 30 minutes. Trufis are like taxis that you pile into with a bunch of others. They cost 4 Bs each way. To get around town we all just walked. Everything is very close. I recommend going to the markets, especially the Saturday market. Also, everyone should walk up to the Copa de Vino where you can see the whole city. For travel away from Tarija, we went to Salar de Uyuni one weekend. I highly recommend this. We took a bus from Tarija to Potosi and then a taxi thing from Potosi to almost Uyuni. FIND OUT IF THERE ARE ROAD BLOCKS. I think there would have been a better way to get there and find a tour if there weren't blocks. The busses were expensive and we ran into a lot of problems.

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

Being an anatomy and physiology major at the UO has prepared me incredibly for this internship. Although the medical terms are in Spanish, most things are similar if not the same. I generally know what is going on and what a patient's symptoms should be and why. These classes, mostly anatomy, have prepared me for nearly all of the cases I have seen here in Bolivia.

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

I have discovered that I probably do not want to work in a hospital in my career. I would much rather have a private practice. The doctors in the hospital seem to never interact with their patients, which is my favorite part. I have also learned that I will not be a doctor who simply prescribes medicine to whoever walks in the door. I have seen a lot of that here and I do not necessarily agree with that method of treatment.

Now is the time to begin thinking about how to articulate all your experiences you are gaining for the job search when you graduate. Identify 3-4 accomplishments or successes in your internship of which you are most proud. These can be professional, personal or cross-cultural. Explain them briefly below.

I have improved my Spanish drastically while I have been here. This is my biggest accomplishment. When I came, I had background knowledge, but being taught only in classrooms, I didn't have a lot of experience with communication.

I have also seen a lot here, including multiple surgeries and general clinic visits. Expanding my experiences was one of my goals and this was most definitely met by doing rotations in clinics and hospitals.

Additionally, I have become much more comfortable being on my own in a foreign country. Before I came, I was scared that if I went anywhere alone I would be in danger, but while I have been here I have become much more independent and less afraid of being in a big city by myself.

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**

Spanish: I came to Bolivia with only somewhat advanced background knowledge of Spanish that included grammar rules and complex sentences. Here I had practice almost all the time and I really became good. One thing that I really improved with was conversational Spanish that people use everyday, and that I believe is the most important. Being in a very accepting and friendly home in Tarija made it so that I had no challenges. They helped me with what I didn't know and I learned very quickly. Being with a Spanish speaking family and taking Spanish classes definitely allowed me to conquer any challenges that I might have faced. My Spanish teacher here even says I do not sound like a gringa and I now have excellent Spanish.

Experience: I have witnessed so much here in Bolivia and have been able to do things in the hospitals as well. Going on different rotations every week showed me the different fields and medical areas. I did not necessarily face any challenges, because I was just gaining experience,

but a few of the rotations were not my cup of tea and I did not feel I was getting anything from them. Instead of being bored and wasting my time when I had so many opportunities at my fingertips, I simply asked to change my rotation for the week. This turned out to be so much better because I felt my time was being spent on something so much more valuable to me.

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

The hospitals and clinics here in Bolivia are very different from those in the US. The patients at clinics must show up at 4 in the morning to have a chance at getting an appointment. Also, the patients are all examined on the same bed in the same office. Cleaning procedures are not as strict here. Also, the doctors do not really have any regard for the patient's time. I have witnessed on multiple occasions doctors answering phone calls or talking to drug reps while patients were in the middle of telling the doctor something. It was very strange.

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

Some advice to future interns going to Tarija (in the winter months – June, July, August): bring warm clothes. Don't worry about bringing collared shirt or nice blouses, you will NOT wear them! Bring comfortable clothing that you can layer. Sweaters are good, comfy shoes that are not tiny flats (those can get cold), and boots are a good option. Jeans are totally fine. Black jeans are probably better, but don't worry about buying a ton of dress pants. That was one of my regrets. Not having pants to wear outside of work. You have much more free time than you would expect, so bring comfy, everyday clothes. And bring a jacket (or buy one here) and more than one sweatshirt. I wore the same sweatshirt for pretty much every weekend trip, so it looks like I never changed.

Another tip is to bring a pocket medical Spanish card. This was very helpful to me at times and would be even more helpful to people who aren't too clear on medical Spanish. A whole dictionary is nice if you actually want to go home and look things up or do some studying and you don't want to use the Internet, but I never used mine.

We used scrubs once and that was during an optional ER rotation. You don't need to bring a bunch of them. Also, they have a lot of very American foods here including Oreos and peanut butter, so don't waste space in your suitcase with snacks.