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Final Reflection IE3

Upon arrival to Quito I was excited to begin my journey, and also slightly anxious. Being able to comprehend what is happening in medical clinics was my primary worry. I was unsure how involved I would be and was worried about understanding what was being said because I never had to interact with only Spanish as my sole tool of communication. Also, the sheer size of Quito was intimidating at first because I arrived with no prior experience living in big cities, and walking around before any orientation or meeting other current interns was overwhelming. Once I met some of the interns who had been in Quito for many weeks and had some time to adjust I began to love exploring the city. The first two weeks of the internship I was able to see two completely different scenarios. In Quito I was in the emergency department of a large public hospital serving an urban population, and in Puyo I was in a health post near the jungle catering to a mostly indigenous population. I am glad I was able to experience this diversity early on in my program. It was well organized and I was able to learn a lot about how Ecuador deals with complex demands of healthcare both urban and rural. It amazes me how well access to medical care has been to rural populations, There was even a public health post in the middle of the jungle on a hour long dirt road in a tiny community. Access to clean water for these populations however still is an issue. My experiences have taught me about health outreach in an environment completely different from the U.S. It had helped me move towards accomplishing my goals in language competency and understanding of healthcare delivery and resources in Ecuador.

I had several goals I wished to accomplish during my stay in Ecuador. Professional goals such as gaining a better understanding of healthcare in a global context, personal goals such as becoming more fluent in Spanish, and cultural goals such as understanding cultural reactions and beliefs of medicine were important in defining what I wanted to get out of this experience. I definitely feel like I accomplished those goals. The cross-cultural experiences I had felt most profound. My stay with a Shuar family was very insightful and allowed me to refine my understanding of culture and medicine. Even though I was aware of the dangers of the “savior” complex that many 1st world travelers adopt when travelling to poorer nations, I still found I retained some of these thoughts. It is important to understand the balance between cultural differences and actual social problems. Large families living together is an important cultural trend in some Latin American countries and should not be the focus of pity or worry, but children infected with parasites on a routine basis is a serious social problem. These examples seem clearly defined, but sometimes whether something is just a cultural difference or an actual structural violence can be blurry.

Daily life in Ecuador was busy and eventful. During the weekday I woke up around 6 am to prepare to leave for clinical rotation. Clinical rotations were different each week and encompassed different fields of medicine with different structures. I would be in clinic until 12 pm where I leave for lunch and then Spanish classes from 1-4 pm. After 4 pm I had time to work on secondary applications for medical school, read, relax, explore the city, or a new trend I was trying to pick up; crossfit. The schedule all worked out fine and was flexible due to the blurred boundaries on the perception of time in Ecuador. My living situation was great. I lived with 2 other students which is important I believe for comfort and general support in the program. I

had my own room and bathroom. There was Wi-Fi, which was very important especially for my situation of applying to schools during my internship. Transportation was simple. I either walked, took a bus, or used a taxi to get everywhere I needed. Quito has a very well organized system to get around town. Transportation had never been a serious issue. The weekends and after clinical time provided sufficient time to explore town and go out of town. In Quito I recommend visiting the old town district, Guayasamin museum, casa de cultura museum, parque Ejido y Carolina, and the malls for shopping. From Quito, visiting Otavalo, Mindo, Papallacta, Cotopaxi, Quilatoa, and Baños is easy using bus and offer a wide range of activities.

Having lived in a very different country with a different language and in both urban and rural environments that were completely new to me, and sometimes navigating these environments alone, I had developed confidence that I can function and adapt to new circumstances with ease. I felt more comfortable navigating this different culture. The most difficult part of the trip was in the beginning when I was afraid to interact with locals and was anxious from just having to take a bus. But as I gained more experience I became more comfortable interacting and exploring other parts of Ecuador. The greatest rewards are when I can speak with a new acquaintance and carry a solid conversation in Spanish and learn something new. The most important coursework I had to prepare for the trip was my Spanish classes. I believe having taken through third year Spanish was very helpful for integrating into the culture and getting the most of the experience. My experiences as an EMT were also helpful in having a basic understanding of medical care and patient interviews. When I had an issue, I could rely on my host parents to help. I had security in knowing that if a serious problem occurred, I could call the staff at IE₃ for assistance. One crucial tip to any future interns taking

part in an international internship is to cherish every moment during your time there. Realize how fortunate you are to have such an experience and use that to motivate you to learn and experience more. This is a time when branching out is critical to a novel and transformative experience.

