Motivations

- Born and raised in Kenya, I have had an interest in medicine since a young age.
- I have always loved to travel and get a chance to immerse myself in a new culture.
- I wanted to experience healthcare in a different country under different circumstances (global health setting).
- Child Family Health International (CFHI) encouraged individuals to learn about global health through cultural immersion.
- I wanted exposure to health care in clinical settings to observe how physicians diagnose and treat patients.
- To see how another country’s healthcare system functions and the tasks that maintain that functionality.
- The program promised medical shadowing in both rural and city settings.

Background

- Bolivia is a country in South America. It is surrounded by various countries: to the north and east by Brazil, to the northeast by Paraguay, to the south by Argentina, to the southwest and west by Chile, and to the northwest by Peru.
- Lake Titicaca, (covers 3,200 square miles (8,300 square kilometers) the second-largest lake in South America resides in Bolivia but is shared with Peru.
- The area of Bolivia is 424,200 square miles which is approximately 950 miles (1,530 km) north-south and 900 miles (1,450 km) east-west; and has a population of about 11.05 million.
- Bolivia is home to the largest indigenous population in the region and is the poorest country in South America.

Activities/Learning

- Participated in a four-week study abroad program through the Child Family Health International organization in Tarija, Bolivia.
- Working with CFHI allowed me to shadow doctors and experience the different health customs in Tarija, Bolivia.
- Attended Spanish lessons and cultural excursions like going to museums.
- Visited medical facilities in both rural and city settings for few hours during the week.
- Explored popular tourist locations throughout Bolivia like Salar de Uyuni (salt flats).

Medical Shadowing

CFHI motto is “LET THE WORLD CHANGE YOU”, it pushes this by immersing us into the culture of the country we are in. CFHI have us the opportunity to stay with families in Bolivia and learn how poverty impacts healthcare in this diverse country. I participated in weekly rotations to different medical facilities where I shadowed doctors in both rural and city settings.

Located in the city was The Hospital San Juan De Dios (one of Tarija’s larger hospitals) where I shadowed doctors and surgeons in their fast-paced environments where we would see multiples inpatients per room. At this hospital, I spent time in the burn unit where I saw a skin graft performed on a burn victim and the surgical ward where I got to be in the surgical room and see surgeries up close, I able to see two child births and spend time with medical students during their clinical rounds.

In a rural setting, I visited The Centro de Salud in San Andres which had a blood bank and laboratory. I shadowed Dr. Alejandro at Plataforma de Chagas as he provided one on one patient care in a slow-paced setting and showed me how to read electrocardiogram which recorded the electrical signals in the heart of a Chagas patient. This clinic’s focus was pregnant mothers, children, and individuals affected with Chagas disease. Chagas is caused by a Trypanosoma cruzi, commonly known by the Tarija locals as “the vanchuga bug”, this parasite is also a vector that sucks your blood and caused Chagas disease. There are two phases of Chagas disease: Acute phase which can last a few weeks or months and the infection is mild and asymptomatic and chronic phase which affects digestive, cardiovascular, and neurological systems.

Challenges

- Travelling to a foreign country, I faced many obstacles throughout the whole trip:
  - Interacting with people because I couldn’t speak Spanish
  - Traveling outside the country by myself
  - Getting a visa prior to the trip because am not a United States Citizen
  - Financing the trip
  - Been away from what am familiar with, like family and friends for a month
  - Getting acquainted to my host family and the customs of Bolivia
  - Missing Bolivia, my host family, and the fellowship with the other UWT students after I left.

Conclusions

Living and learning about the lifestyle and social constructs of both rural and city environments as they impact healthcare in Tarija, Bolivia was one of the most teachable moments I have had the pleasure of experiencing. My time in Tarija taught me to appreciate another culture and language, but it also taught me to treasure my ability to communicate with everyone in the United States with ease and the significance of healthcare facilities in U.S. and all they offer such as cleanliness, availability of doctors, space to keep inpatients and many more. This trip helped me grow as an individual as well as a student – it helped my confidence in overcoming challenging circumstances and gave me inspiration to learn more. My desire to help even after the experiential study abroad learning program has not changed, in fact it has risen to a whole new level. I am now, more than ever, motivated to practice medicine elsewhere. Once, I finish my education I plan to travel outside the United States and provide my services in as many places as I can. I know help is needed everywhere but I believe that there are some places that do not have enough doctors and specialists; and if I can be of help then that’s where I want to be. I want to involve myself in the study of health disparities and equity, and the effects it has on people all over the world. I am grateful that I got the opportunity to study abroad and learn so much about healthcare in different settings.

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References
