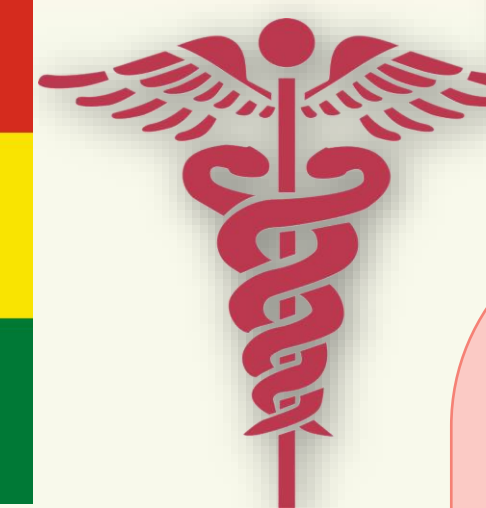
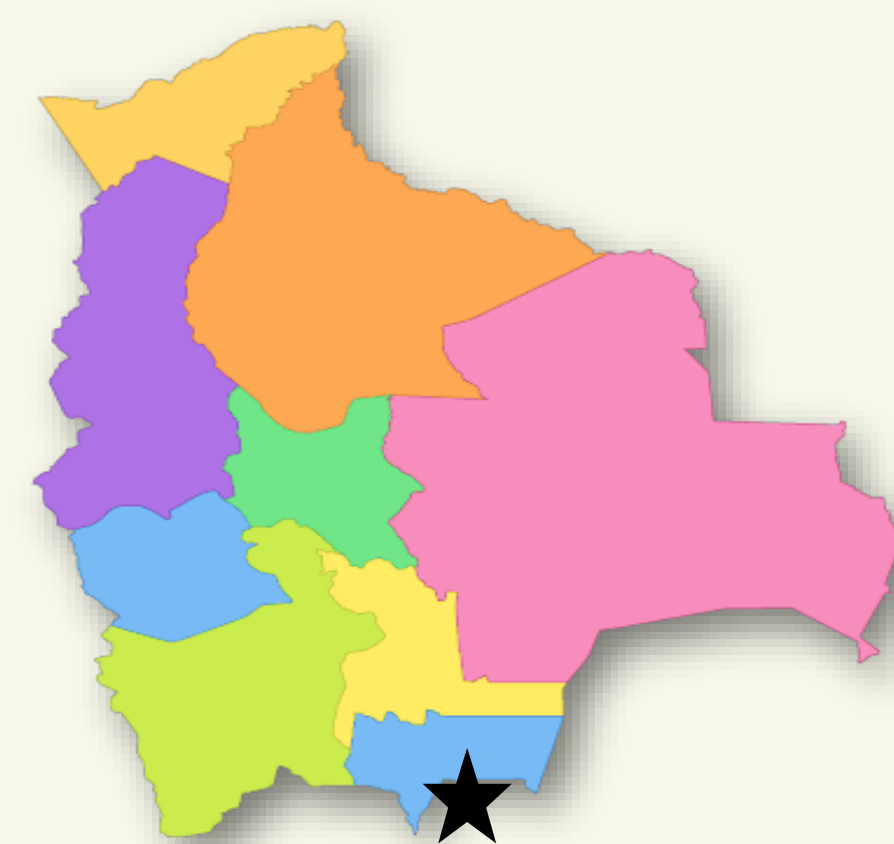


Exploring the Healthcare System in Tarija, Bolivia



Abstract

Bordering Argentina, Tarija is one of Bolivia's nine departments and is part of the SUS universal healthcare system. The city of Tarija is relatively tranquil with a population of 249,730. Here, I shadowed the surgical and gynecological departments of a tertiary healthcare center to better understand the intricacies of this healthcare system and the barriers to care.



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Biomedical Sciences
Faculty Advisor: Leighann Chaffee

Recommendations

- Walking shoes • Pepto Bismol
- Duolingo • Advocate for yourself

Findings:

- High rates of pediatric cancer; possibly attributed to heavy metals in water as a result of illegal mining
- Lack of online medical record system; all patient data is handwritten & physically stored
- Hospital is in need of renovation/lack of funding+ scarcity of resources (ex: reuse of single-use surgical caps)
- Ventilation system not working in majority of surgical rooms
- Medical equipment is mostly donated /second-hand
- Appointments made in-person on Fridays rather than by phone with wait times of ~2-3 months
- Broken elevator on gynecological floor impacting speed of care

Conclusions

While SUS has been successful in expanding healthcare coverage, it has also resulted in lower quality of care due to prolonged wait times and low doctor: patient ratios. Political corruption is directly impacting health of Chapacos. Healthcare workers are resilient, creative and often improvise given their lack of resources. The warmth of Tarija's doctors/residents and nurses and their obvious regard for patients has inspired me vastly in my pre-med journey.



Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the IIGE for providing me w/ a scholarship, Leighann Chaffee for her guidance, CFHI, my peers, and all the healthcare professionals that aided me during this trip.

Program

The CFHI program in Tarija lasted three weeks and was coordinated by a local couple with meetings every Friday. Homestay involved accommodations w/ a local family and 3 meals a day. Shadowing occurred 7 am-12 pm Mon-Fr under guidance of preceptor. Spanish classes/cultural immersion tours occurred 3-5pm.

Activities

- Planetarium Visit • San Lorenzo
- Coffee Tour
- Wine Tour • Paleontology Museum
- And more... *Salar De Uyuni/San Jacinto