

Healthcare Access: Evaluating the U.S. and Bolivia through Global Learning

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One avenue for students to become more familiar with the modes of healthcare delivery outside of the United States is through global learning, such as studying abroad with a partner organization. The goal of my project was to evaluate social determinants of health including healthcare access and quality in the social and community context.

The US healthcare system contains a mix of public and private insurance, with high costs for both. In Bolivia, they also have a mixed system but the primary one is a universal care system, SUS (Sistema Unico de Salud), providing free healthcare for all. The universal access in Bolivia creates long wait times for patients due to some limitations put on through the providers especially affecting rural areas. To research the difference in these healthcare systems, I traveled to Tarija, Bolivia through Child Family Health International (CFHI) for a 3-week program and was able to observe healthcare delivery in primary and tertiary healthcare settings. I found that the lack of staffing and distance to the location led to patients arriving early to secure a spot and long wait times to be seen. Also to reach those who lacked access to clinical services, in person preventive outreach was used. Through this experience I explored the themes of 1) healthcare access by observing resources, staffing, wait times and impacts on rural areas, 2) preventive healthcare programs and outreach, and 3) my own openness and cultural adaptability in this new setting through the lens of global learning.