Prevailing Socioeconomic Conditions: Contextualizing Disparities in Healthcare in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Tiffany Tsai, 2025, Psychology
Fiocruz (Oswaldo Cruz Foundation): Evandro Chagas National Institute of Infectious Diseases (INI), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
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Introduction

- Fiocruz is one of the most prominent health institutions of science and technology in Latin America
- INI is a unit of Fiocruz specialized in research, training, and treatment of infectious diseases
- INI is a major medical reference facility composed of a hospital, out-patient clinics, research laboratories, diagnosis laboratories, a pharmacy, and more

Objective of Internship

I wanted to gain insights into how to reduce health disparities by expanding my knowledge of public health and learning about another country’s healthcare system. Further, I hoped to gain clinical experience and technical skills to prepare for a career in the healthcare field.

Work Profile

- Observed and assisted physicians as they aided patients in the following out-patient clinics: HIV/AIDS, Chagas Disease, Leishmaniasis, Tuberculosis, Acute Febrile Diseases, and Infectious Dermatology
- Partook in hands-on diagnostic laboratory procedures
- Observed clinical procedures

Out-Patient Clinics

- Observed procedures such as skin lesion biopsies, cryotherapy, intralesional infiltration treatment for cutaneous leishmaniasis, and how to perform and interpret echocardiograms and electrocardiograms
- Patient interactions, discussions with physicians, learning about patient history and thought process behind forming a diagnosis

Diagnosis and Research Laboratory

- Leishmaniasis Surveillance Laboratory and the Parasitology Laboratory
- Diagnostic procedures such as ELISA and MLEE
- Learned about ongoing research projects

Socioeconomic Context & Anecdotes

- Consider the manifestations of wealth in patient care and access to medical services: commute, illiteracy, and lack of basic health knowledge
- Distinct climate regions and wealth gap between neighborhoods
- Patients’ symptoms are left neglected or mistreated
  - Malaria in Acute Febrile Diseases clinic
  - Leishmaniasis in Dermatology clinic

Reflection

Photo at the Evandro Chagas statue with representatives from INI and Princeton

Photographer: Renan Melgaço

Out-Patient Clinics

Photograph at the INI conference room

Photographer: Renan Melgaço

Questions

- I wonder how many patients suffer from consequences of erroneous medical treatment but go unnoticed due to the financial infeasibility of visiting a larger facility like Fiocruz or pursuing legal action against malpractices
- How can the quality of medical services in local medical facilities and clinics be improved?

Looking Ahead

- Reaffirmed my decision to pursue a career in healthcare
- Became critically aware of the scale and prevalence of health disparities
- Connecting to my own community

Conclusion

- Access to healthcare is a dire necessity
- We must raise awareness of the current conditions and prevalence of health disparities and critically evaluate the communities around us

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