Introduction

The FIBUSPAM clinic is supported by a US-based non-profit organization. The clinic serves an almost entirely indigenous population that comes to the city of Riobamba to receive specialty care such as ophthalmology, gynecology, and dentistry as well as general medicine.

Objective of Internship

The internship gave me the opportunity to live abroad, work in a clinic environment, and coordinate American volunteers working with local clinic staff. My objective was to make an impact on the organization while learning about the practice of medicine from the doctors working there as well as from translating for American doctors.

Work profile

• Conducted patient interviews to collect data for research on pterygium.
• Coordinated American volunteers with local clinic staff while establishing a mobile clinic in rural Ecuador.
• Interpreted for an American physician.
• Organized and taught a CPR class for clinic staff.
• Fundraised for patients to fly to the US for reconstructive surgery.

Reflection

• The doctors and nurses at the FIBUSPAM clinic serve a population that travels far from rural areas to receive treatment in the city of Riobamba.
• Although Ecuador has a public health system that is free to all, issues with wait times as well as accessibility to specialist care (particularly ophthalmology and dentistry) make FIBUSPAM a way for patients to receive care they would otherwise not have.
• Through interviewing patients diagnosed with the eye disease pterygium, I was able to get a sense of patients’ thoughts on the healthcare system as well as factors that put them at risk for the disease.
• For a week of the internship, I was able to co-lead a group of American volunteers working with clinic staff to set up a mobile clinic in rural areas of Ecuador. The mobile clinic provided ophthalmology, dentistry, and general medicine services for free to all residents of the communities visited. From talking to patients as well as community leaders, I learned about the challenges these communities face because of lack of access to healthcare. It was incredibly rewarding to translate for an American general medicine physician and help to treat patients who would have otherwise been unable to access healthcare.
• The mobile medical clinic also distributed reading glasses and sunglasses to members of the community. Reading glasses allow people losing their close vision to adjust and remain able to read and work on the fabrics from which they make their living. Sunglasses provide protection from the sun, a major risk factor for pterygium.

Looking ahead

I hope to complete my degree in Molecular Biology and eventually medical school. In the future, I have made it a goal to go back to Ecuador and work with FIBUSPAM as a doctor.

Questions

• How can healthcare be made more accessible for people in rural Ecuador?
• Can the model of having a clinic entirely run by local staff but funded by a US non-profit work in other countries?

Conclusion

FIBUSPAM provides quality healthcare services to populations otherwise unable to access healthcare by establishing a local-run clinic.

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