Introduction & Internship Background
FIBUSPAM is a clinic, dedicated to providing affordable medical care to patients throughout the Chimborazo region, and is located in the city Riobamba. This region is located within the Andes mountain range. The majority of the patients that the clinic sees regularly are from indigenous communities and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Work Profile
My role at this internship was as a general intern and research assistant included:

- Photographing patients’ eyes and taking surveys to gather data for a study
- Making promotional and informative videos for the clinic
- Shadowing and assisting doctors
- Serving as a Spanish-English translator for a medical caravan
- Distributing reading glasses to patients in rural communities
- Helping to apply for funding and create a fundraising campaign for two children to go to the United States for surgical treatment.

Methods and Observation
As a research assistant I worked on a study being conducted on the eye condition, pterygium, in Ecuador with the Principal Investigators, Sila Bal and Gil Binenbaum, from the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. The Andes experiences some of the highest UV exposure in the world, due to altitude and proximity to the Equator. Regular UV-B exposure to the eyes increases risk of Cortical cataracts, pterygium, ocular melanoma, and other conditions which can lead to visual impairment and blindness (1). Pterygium is an especially common condition seen here with anywhere between one and five patients with the condition coming into the clinic daily. Pterygium is chronic, and it is an epithelial hyperplasia. This means that there is an excess growth of epithelial cells, and it shows tumor-like properties. A conjunctiva with signs of pterygium will show an excess amount of growth that can extend onto the cornea of the eye.

The clinic works to treat these eye conditions by providing an affordable ophthalmologist that conducts pterygium and cataract surgeries, as well as regularly traveling to more secluded villages with medical caravans and providing treatment there. During our visits to these villages I helped distribute reading glasses, as well as sunglasses to help people protect their eyes from excessive sun exposure in the countryside and avoid developing eye conditions.

Conclusion
This clinic and foundation plays an important role within the region. It works to fill gaps within the healthcare system and focuses on treatment of the most commonly seen conditions. FIBUSPAM’s purpose is crucial, because it provides affordable primary and secondary medical services to those most at risk within the Chimborazo province.

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Reflection
Through my experience working with FIBUSPAM, in the clinic and on the medical caravan, I learned more about the medical conditions that commonly afflict people living in these communities. Not only did many patients worry about the aesthetic and discomfort of their eyes, but they also worried about being able to afford treatment. I have seen that a public health crisis should not only be classified as a natural disaster, epidemic, or condition that increases mortality. Conditions such as pterygium, that affect vision, can significantly decrease quality of life and even cost someone their livelihood.

My work in Ecuador has further motivated me to pursue a career in medical research, with an emphasis on public health.

Figure I. Eye without Signs of Pterygium
Figure II. Eye with Signs of Pterygium