

Medical Student Enrichment Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Lima, Peru – Cayetano Heredia University

Dates of Training: February 2, 2020- March 1, 2020

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Date of Reflection: March 31, 2020

Every morning, we awoke to the sounds of the masses below our apartment in the neighborhood of Breña. After donning our scrubs, we made the walk to the hospital. The sidewalks of Lima are an eclectic mix: street carts selling “choclo con queso,” men with bags full of every household item you could want to purchase, and parents shuffling their children off to school. The streets themselves were just as full, if not more so. There was an endless stream of buses that would take you to any corner of the city if you had the time. Traffic lanes were more of a suggestion than a rule, and horns rung out in a constant chorus.



After about 30 minutes, we would reach Hospital Nacional Arzobispo Loayza, where we entered through the employee entrance to avoid the large crowds at the front of the complex. Rather than a few tall buildings that make up most hospitals in the United States, our hospital was a compound of numerous buildings, all one or two stories, that together took up multiple city blocks. Each building houses a different specialty, with our destination being “Pabellón 6-I” for general surgery. When you enter, you lay your eyes upon two large connected rooms, each with more than 20 beds lining the walls. This is where all of the general surgery patients stay during their time in the hospital. The operating rooms were in the back of this building as well, so that virtually all aspects of care took place in this one building. There is a constant hum of activity as doctors, nurses, and staff move about.

Twice a week, we attended clinic with our attending surgeon. We saw surgical consults, post-operative visits, and many small outpatient procedures. The most striking difference was the lack of an electronic medical record. All records, both inpatient and outpatient, were kept in paper charts. After becoming so accustomed to using computers for everything in the hospital, this was a drastic change. In addition to clinic, we went to the operating room twice a week as well. We



predominantly saw surgeries on the biliary system, and I had the chance to scrub in on multiple surgeries. Many of the operating rooms did not have air conditioning, and along with the cloth surgical gowns and the summer Peruvian heat, it made for quite the warm experience.



Hospital Nacional Arzobispo Loayza is a publicly funded hospital, so the patient population is largely the underserved, socioeconomically disadvantaged people of Peru. Patients come from all over Lima, as well as from much farther away, sometimes traveling for days from remote areas of the Peruvian jungle. This makes for a very interesting mix of patients. In terms of the academic setting, our experience was not all that unlike hospitals in the United States. Medical students, interns, residents and attendings all play a part in the patients' care, taking graded responsibility based on their level of training. Getting to know the Peruvian medical students helped us navigate the hospital, and they helped us learn even more on a medical student level.

As a future physician, this experience had a drastic impact on how I will practice medicine in the future. Being a non-native Spanish speaker in

a Spanish speaking country showed me just how difficult it is for patients in the United States who do not speak English. Every interaction with medical staff, nurses, and doctors is made exponentially more difficult when a language barrier exists. Even basic questions can be misunderstood and lead to errors in a patient's care. Through my experience, I have become even more passionate about working to care for Spanish speaking patients in the United States.

Outside of the hospital, my eyes were opened to an entirely new culture. This was my first experience living abroad, and it did not disappoint. From art museums to restaurants to soccer games, we did our best to explore every aspect of Peruvian culture that Lima had to offer. We also took the opportunity to travel to Cusco and the ancient Incan city of Machu Picchu. There is a magic about Machu Picchu that is truly indescribable. Seeing one of the Seven Wonders of the World will forever be one of my favorite days of my life. All in all, my rotation was an incredible experience, both medically and culturally. Without the help of the International Medical Education team, I would never have had the opportunity to spend a month learning in Peru. I am eternally grateful to them all, and I would encourage any medical student reading this to take advantage of this incredible opportunity!

Zach Gentry

