

Oaxaca, Mexico International Rotation

For my junior year selective I worked at the state hospital in Oaxaca, Mexico. Oaxaca has a very large and poor indigenous population that has limited access to even rudimentary healthcare services. The trip was organized through Stanford University and Child Health Family International, an organization that designs immersive training experiences for healthcare workers committed to working with the immigrant Latino population in the United States. The goals of the rotation included learning about the health care system in Mexico, the training of Mexican health care professionals in Mexico and the role of community health and poverty in forcing immigration to the United States. There was also ample opportunity to learn about indigenous traditional medicine in Oaxaca, an essential component of the healthcare system there, given the lack of healthcare services.

One of the first things you'll notice during this elective is the striking difference between Mexican and American hospitals. The Mexican health care system is overwhelmed with patients and completely under-funded. Gurneys line all available walls, even on the wards. The emergency room is one long hall lined with beds and only enough room to walk sideways between them. There is little privacy for pelvic and rectal exams and no extra space for isolation rooms. In order to save money the hospital waits until 11am to turn on the air conditioning and then promptly turns it off at 2pm. During the rest of the day patients and workers sweat in the heat, swatting at mosquitoes and flies. When the electricity goes out or the number of patients outstrips the available ventilators, Mexican interns spend their afternoons bagging two patients at a time. Your heart will break as you listen to the stories of families who pooled their resources to buy chemotherapy medications they traveled to Mexico City to buy. And you will cringe as you listen to residents debating who gets priority for the blood products available that day. Some patients will have to wait and may ultimately die because of the shortage.

But if you are ready for adventure and learning you will be impressed with how Mexican residents make do with so few resources. Everything becomes based on the clinical exam when expensive laboratory and imaging tests are limited. Everything is recycled, cleaned and reused. You will see diseases you rarely see back home in the U.S.: untreated AIDS, Dengue, Chagas, extra-pulmonary TB and severe malnutrition. You will be shocked at the impact of migration to the United States on the health and wellbeing of those who stay behind. You will have patients consistently hug and kiss you, thank you repeatedly and invite you to their homes for dinner. They will eagerly want to teach you about their own traditional indigenous healing practices. Because of the lack of education you will have to be creative when teaching your patients about the concept of microbes, the necessity of using latrines and why they should waste their clean water on hand washing.

As a resident mentor you will be expected to contribute to classroom discussions and serve as a resource for American medical students and undergraduate students during the clinical rotation. You will also be asked to give a lecture and lead discussions on health topics and identify one or two readings to accompany your presentations. In return

Stanford University will facilitate organization of Spanish language classes and cultural excursions and arrange for local attendings to precept you and guide your experience. You will be expected to pay your own travel (I paid \$800), lodging (I shared an apartment with another resident and paid \$600 but you can stay with a family for \$120/week) and your food.

Overall this was an excellent rotation for training health care providers to be leaders in global health and cooperate across borders. If you are interested send a brief email to Ann Banchoff, Program director (banchoff@stanford.edu) by April 25, 2008 and include your relevant background (personal and professional), proposed lecture topics and preferred dates in Oaxaca. Please see <http://och.stanford.edu/oaxaca.html> for more information (and note that application deadlines for medical students and residents are different).



