

Expanding Access to Interdisciplinary Medical Care and Public Health in Rural Honduras

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Community Organization

Partner Organizations: Global Medical Brigades and University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

Mission: To empower rural communities through the holistic promotion of global health through primary medical care and public health interventions.

Population Served: Over 1,000 community members of Los Terrones.



Personal Growth

Lessons Learned

- Self-discovery often happens outside of one's comfort zone
- The importance of gratitude, patience, and resiliency
- The power of strong communities in looking out for one another
- Empathy is a muscle which is built by listening to understand others
- Proactive and effectively implemented public health measures can help prevent many common diseases

Personal Awareness

- Appreciation for the sacrifices my family has made to make a better life for me in the US
- Health disparities are widespread not only in rural Honduras, but also many communities in the US (rural, urban, low SES, etc.), leading to worse lifetime health outcomes.



Community Impact

- Set-up a mobile rural clinic in an abandoned schoolhouse in Los Terrones, Honduras
- Assisted Honduran physicians, dentists, and pharmacists provide medical and dental care to over 1,000 community members who did not have access to the aforementioned
- Educated children on public health initiatives like dental health, nutrition, and exercise through games and songs.
- Dug trenches and laid over 250 yards of pipe to help provide clean drinking water to the Los Terrones community.
- Aided local masons in building "eco-stoves" with proper ventilation to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning and smoke inhalation from fires indoors



Challenges

- The community of Los Terrones is approximately 100 miles away from Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. Poverty is omnipresent and access to medical care is scarce outside of the capital city.
- The majority of the patients had walked for miles to stand in long lines for a chance to be seen by our providers. We stayed open until everyone was seen.
- The lack of access to technology and resources led to dental extractions performed on lawn chairs and digging miles of ditches by hand.
- To ration prescription medications, individuals with chronic conditions like hypertension and T2DM were only given a 90-day supply of medication. However, another mobile clinic would not return to the community for another 6 months to 1 year, leaving them with gaps in their life-saving treatments.
- Access to clean, fresh water was scarce, leading to high consumption of sodas, perpetuating obesity, T2DM, and other lifestyle driven diseases.
- Although we were students, many patients assumed that we were the providers, instead of the Honduran providers because of the color of our skin.
- Communication of disease and treatment plans was difficult due to a language barrier.

Rewards

- Each remote clinic was set up and run by Honduran physicians, dentists, and pharmacists which promoted interdisciplinary care and helped the self-sufficiency of the program in Honduras.
- The mentorship of our physicians and their willingness to take the time to teach us about common conditions in Honduras, like parasitic infections, that are rare in the US
- Learning about medications and the conditions treated with the pharmacists while filling prescriptions for patients



Academic Learning

Study through Service

- While assisting providers, learned about the pathophysiology of disease and how adaptations are made
- Improved our ability to listen, problem-solve, and be flexible when building relationships with patients
- Mastered how to take an accurate and efficient manual blood pressure measurement

Outside the Classroom

- Learned basic conversational Spanish to better communicate with the patients we were caring for
- Gained a better understanding of how health disparities impact communities and the progression of disease
- Understood the impact that taking the time to empathize, understand, and care for others can mutually improve wellbeing



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