

Vida Volunteer Medical Program – An Opportunity for Medical Outreach to Underserved Areas

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Community Organization

Organization: Vida Volunteer Medical Program

Mission: Improve the overall health of underserved communities through education and mobile clinics with the goal to reduce inequalities and increase health literacy in our partner communities

Population Served: Children and adults of all ages in underserved areas of Costa Rica and Nicaragua



Personal Growth

Lessons Learned:

- Often the best care you can give someone is simply listening to them and offering them a chance to express their needs
- People have the same basic needs wherever they may be in the world – food, water, shelter, health, social
- How community needs are identified and addressed
- How healthcare systems vary in different countries
- Having an open mind will allow you to form more meaningful connections with people and provide you with a greater chance for personal, intellectual, and cultural growth
- Even a small amount of healthcare can make an enormous impact on the overall well-being of an individual and community

Personal Awareness:

- Developed greater understanding for cultural differences
- Learned the value of taking the time to truly listen
- Verified that I truly enjoy learning from and serving others

Impact on Future Career:

- Personal, professional, and cultural growth that will improve my ability to provide compassionate and quality care to my future patients
- Desire for medical outreach in my future practice

Community Impact

What is the Vida Volunteer Medical Program?

- Offers students who are preparing for professional school in a health-related field the opportunity to acquire valuable experience and improve the overall health of underserved communities by providing education and mobile clinics with free basic healthcare

What We Did:

- Conducted home visits as a group alongside a local physician and counseled families on the importance of regular exercise and its benefits to overall health
- Set up field clinics to serve patients of all ages in their healthcare needs
- Provided medications desperately needed by offering pharmaceutical services
- Worked under the supervision of a local licensed physician to obtain a patient history and physical and provide consultation and recommendations

How Did This Program Achieve Its Goals?

- Performed a basic history and physical exam based on patient concerns
- Provided desperately needed medications
- Gathered information on vulnerable populations in the communities about their living conditions and habits to identify needs
- Educated patients on healthy lifestyle choices and disease processes to help increase health literacy

Why Does it Matter?

- Education about healthy lifestyle choices will continue to improve the health of patients and prevent diseases in the communities long after we leave
- Services like this may be the only opportunity the patients have to seek healthcare and increase health literacy



Challenges

Challenges:

- Speaking to patients through an interpreter creates a situation where there is a risk for misunderstanding due to language barriers, cultural differences, and limited medical knowledge
- Some patients needed more care than we could provide at the time – we could give them management advice but there was no chance for follow-up
- The number of patients exceeded our capacity of healthcare providers, resources, and time



Rewards

Rewards:

- Being part of a healthcare team to provide basic medical care to underserved populations
- Connecting with individuals from a different culture and learning from their culture, environment, and stories of day-to-day life
- Meeting other pre-medical students from across the United States and learning from their experiences and perspectives



Academic Learning

Preparing for the Future:

- An opportunity to learn from local physicians about interacting with patients and basic diagnosis and management of health conditions
- Developed critical thinking skills and cultural awareness that will be used in my future practice
- Verified my interest in medical mission work

Thinking Outside the Classroom:

- Grew in my knowledge of how different cultures around the world live and the life challenges they may face
- Appreciating the little difference that a few minutes of listening to patients or providing them care can make for their overall well-being



Thanks

- The local physicians and pharmacy personnel who helped provide care to patients and helped us learn about medicine and healthcare
- Vida Volunteer coordinators, guides, and translators who helped to make our trip a success
- The host families who fed us and provided housing