

Global Health Elective in San Pedro La Laguna, Guatemala

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Background

- As a future outpatient general pediatrician serving bilingual populations, I wanted to work in a rural setting with ample opportunities to practice my Spanish language skills.



Objective

- Describe Guatemalan culture, including traditional medicine beliefs.
- Provide medical care with limited resources.
- Describe how limited access to resources and preventive healthcare impacts pediatric morbidity and mortality.



Preparation

- Resources such as the CDC, WHO & USAID provided information about the Guatemalan culture and healthcare system.
- Aside from Spanish, over 20 separate Mayan languages are spoken. Most common around San Pedro: Tz'utujil, K'iche, Kaqchikel.
- Nationally, 48% of children under 5 years old have chronic malnutrition or growth stunting.



Experience

- Worked with a local doctor to diagnose and treat common pediatric conditions such as diarrheal and respiratory diseases.
- Provided nutrition education to families.
- Learned about common medicinal herbs.
- Assisted in deliveries and newborn care.
- Visited community health departments, regional hospital & nutrition recovery center.
- Lived with a host family and attended language school in the afternoons.

Reflection

- Several public health clinics exist but lack funding or patient buy-in.
- Despite differences in culture or language, parental concerns regarding pediatric nutrition and eating habits are universal.
- Learning to be resourceful and cognizant of personal limitations in resource-poor areas.
- Importance of cultural humility when encountering differences in medical practice.
- Regardless of language, cultural or socioeconomic barriers, partnering with local healthcare staff to provide continuity of care to vulnerable populations is invaluable.



Future Directions

- Partner with a clinic in Central or South America and provide ongoing training/support.
- Use the knowledge I garnered to work in a culturally diverse, bilingual outpatient clinic in New Mexico.