

## Global Health Elective: Costa Rica February 2017- Pura Vida!

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As a native of San Ramon de Alajuela Costa Rica, I came to the United States when I was five years old. Growing up in the U.S. but being born abroad has made me realize that I am from neither country exclusively but somehow simultaneously from both. This unique perspective has imbedded in me a sensitivity and curiosity for different cultures. I know that I am as much “American” as I am “Tica” and with that I have a responsibility to both communities to work creatively to bring improvement in their health care.

During my fourth year of medical school I arranged to do an away elective in San Jose Costa Rica to learn more about the Costa Rican health care system. The opportunity to go out of the country for my last part of medical school training was a full circle experience. It was a chance to go back to the beginning. One of the reasons that we came to the United States was for my mom to get eye surgery, a surgery that I too would later require. So it was a need for medical care that brought us to the United States and now years later I was getting the opportunity to go back to work in a hospital in the capital city of San Jose.

My trip was such a surreal experience that reminded me of my overall journey into medicine. It was a great time to go back and remember from where I came to gain perspective into where I will be going. The end of fourth year before match day is a notoriously exciting and anxious time for medical students across the country. It is when most of us have reached the end of our interview season and have submitted our rank list and are left with no choice but to patiently wait to find out about our future residency training. I spent the month of February in Costa Rica so it was right in the mist of this waiting period. I was thankful to be there during that

time because it allowed me to free my mind from worrying about match day and instead just enjoy and learn from my training there. I also got to visit family on my weekends off! I was able to share so much quality time with them through dinners, taking small trips, or just enjoying a cup of coffee together. It was also so great to hear their stories and perspective on what it was like growing up in Costa Rica. It was this process of remembering my past that gave me perspective and a sense of peace about my future.

One of my main goals from this trip was to get a foundational understanding of the overall health care needs of the population in Costa Rica and the different avenues to receive care. As a future internist I hope to eventually work in Costa Rica with local health care organizations. I hope to build partnerships between institutions in the United States and in Costa Rica to further strengthen collaborations to improve patient care. I am undecided if I want to be there for extended periods of time or short term trips but either way I wanted this global health elective experience to serve as a groundwork to get to know fellow medical students, residents, and faculty who can guide me on how to better build those partnerships. I got to meet remarkable people in and outside of the hospital whom I know will continue to be my future colleagues. Since I want to give back to my Costa Rican community in the future, I knew this early exposure in my training would be essential to build an understanding of the system and needs of the population there.

An aspect that I found challenging in my experience was communicating with complete fluency the complex medical terminology between medical colleagues. I am fluent in Spanish and have taken course to further refine my reading, writing, and medical terminology so I feel completely comfortable communicating to patients however communicating in medical Spanish between colleagues was a different challenge. I worked in the internal medicine service of the

hospital and would go see my patients in the morning and gather all the needed data however when I had to present it to the attending in “medical lingo” I found it challenging. I would kept wanting to say words in English since I lacked the vocabulary in Spanish. It made me realize how much of a “different language” I learned in medical school and translating that into the appropriate cultural and linguistic context in Spanish can be challenging. My Costa Rican colleagues were very supportive and patient which allowed me to learn so much during my time there.

In closing the experience was everything I could have hoped for and more. It is also important to note that I couldn't have done this journey alone. I would like to take a moment to say a very heartfelt thank you to the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) who have support me in this journey . It was because of the financial generosity of the Anne C. Carter Global Health Fellowship and the American Women's Hospitals Service (AWHS) Overseas Assistance Grant that this trip was made a reality. These programs allowed me the flexibility to design my own global elective experience and believed in my ideas through their financial generosity.