

Sexual Health Education in Ecuador:

When I arrived to Ecuador in June 2019, I had a whole year to look forward to, an expansive amount of opportunity. I traveled to a town called Riobamba where Cacha Medical Spanish Institute hosted me. They are an NGO that teaches medical Spanish and helps organize international rotations. They also help with various

community projects, especially

for Cacha, an indigenous community located in the mountains outside of

Riobamba. I lived in a touristic center called Pucaratambo in

Cacha. It was there that I joined the family of Pucaratambo and Cachamsi along with the

rotating health professionals and students. I learned the ingredients to my favorite soup from “Mama” Luz, indigenous culture from my “sister” Angie, and the needs of the community from my “father”, Segundo. They opened their homes and hearts to me, giving me the strength to help the ongoing projects of Cachamsi.

While working with Cachamsi, I had the opportunity to help improve their website and marketing by reaching out to program directors of various residencies and medical schools. I participated in medical Spanish classes and patient care. While investing my time in helping Cachamsi, I also worked on implementing a Latinx-friendly sexual health education curriculum called Big Decisions by Dr.



Jeanette Realini working with Healthy Futures of Texas in local high schools in the Riobamba area. I looked for various routes for implementation while trying to maintain sustainability. Through this process, I learned the importance of stakeholders. Working with Cachamsi gave me connections to local universities, high schools, and hospitals. While we were in the process of training local health providers who had the responsibility to teach sexual health education in local high schools in the curriculum,

coronavirus hit Ecuador. A nearby city in Ecuador became a global epicenter and strict quarantine regulations began. I made the hard decision to come back to the United States and continue my medical studies. However, we are attempting to see how we can continue the project while writing papers on our observational studies and



an opinion piece on sustainable implementation in Ecuador.

Although there were constant setbacks to my projects, I learned so much during this past year. Not only directly from doctors, nurses, and Spanish professors

but from the Ecuadorian people themselves. I would be talking to a local on a bus and they would learn about my work. They would express their own opinions on abortion, sexual education, and teen pregnancy. I heard from many people that it was very easy to get “underground” abortions. I learned from many adolescents that sexual health was rarely talked about in the household but constantly heard in songs. I learned from patients that stigma deterred them from readily available contraceptive methods.

By being present with the Ecuadorian community for an extended period of time, I gained a better understanding to their culturally sensitive needs while learning how to navigate beaurocracy. I will use this knowledge to improve future project implementation as we continue to adapt to our new normal. I would like to thank AMWA for their generosity in allowing me to learn more about sustainable development in the context of sexual health. Thank you for allowing me to pursue my dream of becoming fluent in Spanish to help my future patients!

