



FSUCares Outreach:

Preparing a Culturally Appropriate Workforce through Service Learning

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Background

The presence of Florida State University in Panama is well-established through the existing FSU Panama campus located near Panama City in the “City of Knowledge.” The school’s relationship with Filipina was born out of undergraduate service outreach through which the village’s school was built. Shortly thereafter, the College of Medicine and FSUCares established a presence in Filipina through annual international medical outreach during Spring Break.

The bond between FSUCares and Filipina continues to flourish today, facilitated by the friendships that have formed among our attending physicians and the people of the village. This allows for a remarkable continuity of care, while not sacrificing the ability to adapt and meet the needs of Filipina and the nearby communities.



**“Una amistad,
una vision,
una realidad.”**

“One friendship, one vision, one reality”

Access To Care

Throughout our trip, patients and physicians shared personal insight into Panama’s healthcare system:

•Health care in Panama is provided through the government and via private practice. The public health care delivery system is financed through the Ministry of Health and Social Security, providing coverage to roughly 70 percent of the population. Lack of funding creates a shortage of beds for the high volume of patients that depend on publicly funded insurance coverage. Metropolitan areas such as Panama City attract the majority of doctors, where there are higher patient loads and more economic opportunities. Emergency medical systems are well-established in urban areas, yet continue to fall short in providing services to more rural areas such as Filipina.

•Costs per health care visit are significantly less than that of developed nations such as the United States. Yet, this disparity becomes less substantial when costs per health care visit are considered in relation to average wage earned.

•The common experience for most patients is that the hospital staff—including doctors and nurses—are very caring and eager to help. However, not unlike the United States, it is the system that fails them.

FSUCares & Panama in 2012



Clinical Immersion:

Our clinical immersion experience involved traveling to a nearby village and setting up clinic in a central, accessible space (e.g. school, church). We gained practical knowledge for the drugs at our disposal, and we were introduced to procedures such as vaccinations and Pap smears. During our patient interactions, we conducted a history and focused physical exam, then presented to our attending physicians. Following oral presentation, our attendings guided us in counseling our patients and suggesting an adequate treatment plan.

Clinical Immersion Day 1: Bajo Del Rio

Clinical Immersion Day 2: Lagunita

Clinical Immersion Day 3: Mangralito

Clinical Immersion Day 4: Filipina

Tour of the Social Security Hospital: Panama City

We were led by a neurologist through the hospital, meeting with physicians in the Department of Geriatrics, the Neurosurgery Unit, and the Critical Care Unit. During the tour we saw firsthand the extent to which shortage of beds and physicians pervade the Social Security healthcare system.

How has this trip impacted our views about our future practice?

•Our patient-centered skills are valuable in providing care to patients despite a significant language barrier.

•Chronic disease pervades throughout the world. Especially in the face of limited resources, a thorough history, physical exam, and counseling are critical tools for managing chronic disease in a variety of care settings.

•Exposure to such a wide variety of patient demographics and health conditions has broadened our interests in future specialty pursuits.

Recommendation for delivery of services to immigrants from Latin America in Florida

•Recognize the importance and involvement of family in the healthcare of Hispanic patients. In contrast to the somewhat individualistic perspective of patients in the United States, it was our impression in Panama that the family unit is heavily involved and informed in the care of each individual.

•Be aware of your body language and speech modulation during patient encounters.

•A culturally sensitive understanding for the biopsychosocial background of patients is crucial in forming the appropriate treatment plan that meets the patient’s unique needs.



Personal Reflections

Juliana Matthews M1



“Panama was phenomenal. Each day I spent there was a reminder of why I joined the medical profession, and why I came to FSU College of Medicine. It was an opportunity to provide care, to learn, to reflect, and to just enjoy the company of classmates, faculty, and the people of Filipina. Our trip was more than a medical experience, especially because of the relationship FSUCares has made with the people of Filipina.”

Jonathan Salud M1



“My experience in Panama was ‘life-defining.’ I came away not only with a plethora of clinical pearls in chronic and infectious disease, but as well a deeper appreciation for the value of patient-centeredness, especially in overcoming ‘barriers’ such as language or cultural difference. I am so grateful to be a part of the long-standing mutual admiration society that exists between FSUCares and the community of Filipina.”

Geami Britt M1



“My time in Panama was life-changing in so many ways. I started out on the trip with feelings of nervousness and not knowing what to expect. I left Panama with a sense of peace and a new interest in cross-cultural medicine. I gained an immense amount of medical “pearls” from the amazing physicians on the trip. I am amazed at how vast my medical knowledge became in just four days of clinical service. I am so grateful for the experience, and I look forward to returning next year.”

Tiana Monostory M1



“The best thing about Panama was seeing how much the relationship between FSUCares and Filipina meant to both the residents of the village and our medical team. It is not simply a partnership based solely on us providing medical care to them, but rather it is a very real friendship deeply rooted in mutual respect, adoration, and appreciation.”

Kristen Valencia M1



“The most meaningful part of my trip to Panama was the friendships that were made with the people of Filipina, our faculty, and my classmates. I was expecting to have a week in which I learned more about my future career in medicine, however I came away from this experience with so much more. The knowledge I gained by immersing myself into the Panamanian culture and getting to know the villagers was something that could not be taught in the classroom.”

John Thomas M2



“I am very grateful for all of the wonderful experiences I had during my second FSUCares trip to Panama. Interacting with the people of Filipina reminds me that it truly is a privilege to practice medicine. I look forward to my medical career and to making a positive impact on my community.”

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