

### **Sloane Clay**

I did not know much about Guatemala before signing up for this trip. The first time I'd ever heard of the country was when my high school classmates volunteered to go there for mission work. The next time I learned a bit about Guatemala was through my linguistic professor who researched Kaqchikel. She invited me to study Kaqchikel with her there for a summer program, unfortunately, COVID began, and I never had the opportunity to go as a college student. I am happy that I was able to finally travel to Guatemala as a medical student because not only was I able to learn about the culture and history of Guatemala, but I was also able to be a part of the healthcare team for Obras Sociales patients. Applying my skills abroad to a diverse and critical patient population was a truly rewarding experience that I will never forget.

The first thing I noticed when we arrived on Monday to Obras Sociales was the line. I have never seen so many patients arrive that early just to be seen by a physician. It was a bit daunting considering I'm barely a second-year medical student, but after meeting Dr. Mateu and Dr. Cruz I was confident I'd be in good hands. When it came time to perform a medical interview, I felt confident considering my experience at Luke's House. However, I have never done a patient interview while supervised by an attending, and my mind went blank more than once. Luckily Dr. Cruz was there to remind me what to ask and to assist me when I had trouble understanding. I realized how valuable that immediate feedback was considering I hadn't received it at any point in my medical education thus far. I also got the opportunity to perform my first bimanual exam that day, and I was humbled that the patient trusted me enough to perform such an invasive procedure. Dr. Chavez did an amazing job walking me through the physical exam on a patient the very next day. I was elated for the opportunity to reinforce those techniques considering we only performed parts of the physical exam one time during the entire school year.

I was humbled over and over again by each patient I encountered throughout the week. Many of them were overjoyed just to be seen at the clinic, let alone by students from the United States. Some shook our hands and thanked us just for visiting their country. This behavior posed a stark contrast to some of my earlier clinical experiences as an ER scribe in the US. I made it a point to ask as many patients as possible where in Guatemala they were from and how long it took them to arrive in Antigua. Some traveled 2 hours, while others 2 days. Many of them volunteered information about their experiences as a citizen of Guatemala: the good and the bad, and I learned more from their firsthand experience than I ever could have in a book or classroom. Some of my favorite encounters were with the children in the post-op ward. They had all undergone various ocular procedures, and I had the opportunity to interview the families and listen to their stories. I admired how far parents and families were willing to travel to get their child the best possible care and improve their quality of life. The kids were also very cute; giggling at me and grinning wildly when I told them I was going to listen to their heart.

Outside of the hospital, I had a wonderful experience getting to know all of the students from the Marroquin medical school. It was so interesting comparing and contrasting our journeys into medicine and how our educational system emphasizes different things. One theme I heard quite often was the value in a "liberal arts education" where students are encouraged to explore different fields during their time in undergrad. Since the Marroquin students went straight to medical school from high school, they expressed how interesting it was that people of so many diverse backgrounds all enter medical school in the US. In contrast, I admired how straightforward the medical school journey is in Guatemala. I was amazed how the cost is so low, and they get much more hands-on experience than we do in the US. Not all of our conversations centered around medicine (thankfully), and I was so grateful they took the time to show us around Antigua and have fun with us during our downtime.

Overall, I'm so glad the Marroquin and LSU could make this trip possible this year, especially in the wake of COVID. This trip will be a core memory of my medical school experience. My experience in Guatemala has renewed my motivation to be the best physician possible.

#### **Dean Dante**

It does not happen often that I go into anything without a concrete sense of expectations of how things would go or feel. Perhaps it was the busyness of the weeks prior to the Guatemala trip, but whatever expectations I could've set I now fully believe would've been blown away anyway. Of course, there was the expectation of finally being able to practice interviewing real patients in Spanish, something I hope I'll be able to continue through Luke's house in the nearby future. However, what I did not expect was to be taught things that immediately pertain to being a good doctor, for example the importance of being able to redirect the focus of a patient interview into the more relevant topics all the while being aware enough not to miss anything potentially important as well as being able to separate "distractors" (but very real problems) from the information the patients give (something that may be a problem unique to underserved communities). Of course, I expected there would be some level of joined activities with the Guatemalan students. But I did not expect to learn medically relevant things from them on top of the cultural exchange that came naturally with our interactions. I expected to have plenty of free time to independently explore and experience more of what Guatemala had to offer, and I believe this is the only expectation that I had that was *fortunately* left unfulfilled.

Doctors Mattheu, Cruz, and Chavez were all instrumental in our experience in Obras Sociales. In that first night, Dr. Mattheu took it upon himself to greet us and make us feel welcome. I believed it helped some with our nervousness, but I think it might've been better if all the doctors were able to greet us. I think that would have made the first day of clinic more comfortable for everyone, allowing us students to be less nervous under the watchful, though understanding, eyes of doctors some of us just met (like Dr. Cruz and Dr. Chavez for the other groups) while engaging with the patients. I don't know if an additional day of non-medically related activity with everyone before the first day of clinic might've have helped, but I believe it would have. It would have given us students more opportunities to get to know and be more comfortable around the doctors prior to interviewing real patients, which for some of us was a first—in Spanish or in English. Though overall, I am glad that we spent that 1<sup>st</sup> day doing the thing all of us expected to do. Dr. Cruz teaching that class on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day I felt was the best timing we could've had. Not only did she give us ample opportunities during the class, but after two days of having had good practice in Spanish, I'm sure I understood more than if it had happened in the first day. I think the class acting as a short "break" from clinic was a good thing, and the mock practice that followed was even better as it not only reinforced some of the concepts taught in class, but it also maintained what we have been doing the past two days—rather than that day being a strictly "class" based experience.

Likewise, the Guatemalan students were also important in making the trip more enjoyable and relatable as a whole. I think if the US students had done the program in isolation, it would not have felt as satisfying and fruitful. That's why I believe it might have been better if the two groups had spent more time together in clinic. While for the most part the two group did things together, I think an opportunity to "shadow and learn from" the Guatemalan students as they carried on with their scheduled course during the preceptorship would have been very fruitful. It might've made the immersion deeper, and we would've had more opportunities to share amongst ourselves our insights about medicine. Certainly, the greater exposure to actual medicine the Guatemalan students have had in comparison to US students would have fostered some interesting exchanges.

Finally, I think the most impactful experience certainly was the conversations I had with the patients, whether it was in clinic or in the recovery area. Those conversations revalidated my conviction to learn medical Spanish and help the underserved. The program, as a whole, reminded me that while I have a long way to go, I can always work towards something similar. Thus, it is my hope that I can continue what the preceptorship has started in me by finding the time and making the effort to help the underserved Hispanic community in New Orleans.

### **Emma Cole**

I thought that the program in Guatemala was one of the best and most rewarding experiences that I have been a part of. It was wonderful to be able to practice my Spanish in the context of medicine and be surrounded by medical Spanish in conversations every day. My vocabulary definitely improved throughout the week, and I now feel much more comfortable interviewing patients and explaining the process of the physical exam in Spanish. It was also great to be able to discuss cases, diagnoses, tests, and treatment plans in Spanish. This trip has inspired me to keep up my language skills throughout the summer and in the future so that I can continue to improve and hopefully become fluent again by the time I am done with medical school.

I learned so much while working with Dr. Matheu, Dr. Cruz, and Dr. Chavez. They each did such a wonderful job teaching us the basics of history taking, physical exams, and made sure to explain the pathophysiology involved in each patient case. I am very grateful to have had this experience as we have not practiced physical exams in school yet, and I have now observed and practiced the exam techniques over a dozen times.

My experience speaking with patients was also very illuminating for me. It was shocking to me that some patients had waited over two years to have surgery and that some traveled as far as five hours just to receive a simple consult in clinic. This made me realize just how privileged we are in the United States to have such accessible medical care at any given time. In addition, I witnessed the challenge of navigating patient care for individuals who live far away and who may not be able to afford hospital visits, surgeries, or medications. For each patient, Dr. Matheu was careful in deciding a treatment plan that would be most feasible for patients in terms of cost, balancing medications, and follow-up visits. In many cases, Dr. Matheu wanted follow-ups with patients after a week or two, but many patients were not able to come back to clinic until the bus from their town returned around a month later. This made me realize how challenging it can be to ensure patients are receiving the care that they need while working within the boundaries of what is practical for them.

It was also very interesting to learn about the healthcare system in Guatemala in general. The students explained to us the difference between the private vs. public medical schools, what kinds of prerequisites they take, and what their coursework and rotation schedule entails once they are in school. It was mind-boggling to learn about some of the things that can happen in their hospitals that would never be allowed in the US. For example, an intern placed a chest tube on the wrong patient (who was only there for knee surgery), and the patient did not even question why they received a chest tube but simply allowed it to happen. It was eye-opening to hear stories like this and made me aware of how different of a learning environment is present there and how their hospitals function compared to the US.

Obras Sociales is a truly amazing institution and even in my one week there, I could see how much it is needed by so many rural Guatemalans. It was so wonderful to see that they have new specialists and surgeons coming in every week from all over the world. This is exactly the type of work I hope to do as a future physician. Ultimately, I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in this

amazing program. It was an eye-opening, educational, and immersive experience that I will always remember, and which has motivated me to not only progress my medical Spanish, but also to serve as a physician and bring much needed medical care to more Spanish-speaking communities in the future.

### **Jayne Mora**

If I can be honest, I almost didn't participate in the Guatemala elective. I was deep in studying for finals and **very deep** in the planning of Camp Tiger that I felt as though I didn't have the time to properly focus on the elective prior to going. I felt as though I didn't deserve to go after I had missed the deadline to submit the application. However, after everyone was discussing details about the trip during our final class session, I started to feel a little bit of FOMO or "Fear of Missing Out," and decided to email Dr. Molina to see if there was still time for me to join the group. As soon as I got the yes, I booked my flight, and it was the best impulsive decision I've ever made!!!

I was extremely nervous about speaking Spanish the entire time in Antigua as I am not the best Spanish speaker in the class. I could definitely understand better than I can speak Spanish, but I was still very nervous that I would get called on to explain something or not be able to understand the patients. However, I was relieved to know we wouldn't be alone when interviewing the patients and that the physicians would help us along the way if we needed help translating anything.

While I loved practicing my Spanish, I thoroughly enjoyed learning how to properly do a physical exam during our clinic visits. In our first year of medical school, we were taught how to do certain parts of a physical exam in our CSI Skills Labs. Even though we had the chance to practice on each other, I felt as though we weren't really directed on how deep we are supposed to palpate or told if we are doing the exam correctly. However, here in the clinic, we had the chance to learn on actual patients as we had the physicians talk through the steps of a physical exam and guided our hands to ensure proper technique. I feel as though we now have an advantage in performing a physical exam compared to the rest of our classmates because we were able to have this in-depth practice here in Antigua!

I absolutely loved Dr. Cruz's class with the Francisco Marroquin medical students. It was nice to see how their medical school discusses a proper HPI and cool to compare our "DOC CLARA PPP" with their "ALICIA." My little notebook is filled with notes and new Spanish vocabulary words from this class that I could use to help during my patient interviews. One of my favorite moments in the class was when we as a group were able to discuss a case with Dr. Cruz and think through the differential diagnoses and treatment plans for the patient in the case. I felt as though this was a fantastic way to be engaged in the class discussion and test us on everything we've learned in our CSI classes so far.

I really enjoyed that our last day was visiting the retirement home. We were immediately greeted by some of the residents who were so happy to have us there and eager to be seen by us. I loved that we were able to work as a team, taking turns in asking questions pertaining to the history and taking vitals. I was super excited when Dr. Cruz confirmed that what I heard in my patient's lungs was indeed crackles! It was also really lovely to learn more about our patients' lives while we took their histories. Through this, I was reminded of my late abuelitos as I saw little bits of them in the patients I encountered. I hope I made them proud by taking the elective to help improve my Spanish.

As we had dinner at Dr. Molina's house, we heard the physicians emphasize how important this opportunity was for us to be in Antigua. To learn and practice our medical Spanish and be the voice for our Spanish-speaking patients really resonated with me. One of the main reasons I decided to go into medical school was so that I could be a physician that could help the Latino community. I saw the discord in the language barrier in medicine firsthand with my abuelitos. I want to help prevent medical errors

caused by this language barrier and fix the patient-physician relationship that usually gets lost as a result of this barrier. I want to be a better physician for my Latino community, and I cannot thank this opportunity in Antigua enough for helping me in my journey!!

### **Maria Lugo**

It has been almost six years since I had been able to see many of the similar things I love about Venezuela. I don't know if it's a Latin America thing but there was something about Guatemala that made me nostalgic towards my country of birth. I found Guatemala to be a country full of life, color, and culture. Simply and humbly beautiful. I felt extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to take this elective and continue to witness how medical systems could differ depending on the country. There were some similarities to the system I witnessed as a child but there were still some very helpful community resources like the facility we visited that were new to me.

Las Obras Sociales del Santo Hermano Pedro were extremely impressive, I had honestly never been a part of something that can create so much change in their own country. An institution that provides highly valued resources and is cost efficient was something I was not aware could be done from the two systems I was raised to know. A big part of my plans for my future involves being able to help communities like the one we tended to in Guatemala. The scheduled surgical groups that come every week to the hospital gave me hope of being able to do the same in the future. It is a big relief that there are existing programs that already do what I hope to do with my career.

This experience was truly humbling. My family has at times been in the same position as many of the people I saw at the clinic. I am aware of the variety of circumstances around me, but I have had a lot of privilege since moving to the United States as well as with my upbringing. It is easy to forget or not think about the struggles that a lot of people in the world must go through to get access to basic health care. Several of the patients we saw had been standing in line since four in the morning after a six-hour ride waiting for a doctor that starts clinic at eight a.m. Even so, the most humbling thing was seeing how the medical system had failed them at some point or another but after every visit without fail they still flooded us with so much gratitude. A lot of the illnesses we saw were easily preventable if they would have had proximity to medical care. There is a lot of good that still needs to be done and this experience has reinforced my desire to make medical care more accessible to communities like the ones we saw and the one that I experienced as a child.

A big bonus to our entire experience was working with the medical students from Francisco Marroquin University that were on rotation at the same time. Being able to witness the difference in our education and theirs was truly eye opening. I was able to identify several gaps in my education from watching them and they were always happy and available to help. After this experience I am looking forward to learning more of the clinical side of medicine rather than just the theory. The students from Francisco Marroquin University were so natural with their patients, and I only hope to be able to do the same in my future. A lot of us were lacking clinical experience so I was also extremely grateful to have Dr. Mattheu, Dr. Cruz, and Dr. Chavez focus on that aspect of our education. Having small physical exam workshops with them and the Francisco Marroquin students helped more than they realized. I am sure managing us and the Francisco Marroquin students while supplementing any individual educational gap could not have been easy, however, they made it look effortless.

Antigua was perfect in every way. The rainy season did not deter us from being able to explore the town and the neighboring towns as well. I fell in love with the culture and its people. I had recently twisted my ankle and spent the entire week in a boot but even that did not slow me down. Everywhere we went and visited was welcoming and full of life. Honestly, I don't even think I had one plate of food I did not

thoroughly enjoyed during my time there. The experiences and the educational aspect of this entire trip were invaluable, and I would do it again in a heartbeat.

### **Tara Korbal**

Traveling to Guatemala was an excellent opportunity to practice my Spanish, clinical skills, and cultural competency. Every country in Hispanoamerica, and their distinct regions have different ways of speaking Spanish and linguistic diversity. Guatemala has a very large proportion of Mayan and other indigenous language speakers. Spending time in Guatemala allowed me to appreciate the great cultural and linguistic diversity.

Before this elective, I was not confident in my physical exam skills at all. We had practiced our history taking in Zoom classes, so I was more confident in that. In the clinic, we had the opportunity to practice our physical exam skills on patients with the Guatemalan attending assisting us. Before, my classmates and I had never had the opportunity to have the attention to help us perfect our exam skills. I was able to practice auscultating the heart and lungs and doing abdomen and cranial nerve exams. When I didn't understand how to do a part of the exam, the attendings took the time to physically place my hands and show me how to do it, which was extremely helpful.

It is very different to practice doing a physical exam once on a classmate and to do an exam on a patient. The patients in the clinic were extremely kind and patient. Eventually, I was able to take the lead in cases, taking the patient history, doing the physical exam, and discussing the diagnosis. This experience has helped me become much more confident and comfortable in my patient encounters. I feel I will be very well prepared for my third-year rotations. Normally, students in the US don't have these types of clinical experiences until much later in their education.

We also were able to spend time with the Guatemalan medical students that were on a rotation in Antigua. I really enjoyed learning about their system of medical education and how it differs from our systems in the US. Spending time with the Guatemalan medical students gave me insight into Guatemalan culture. It was also a great experience to make connections with others from another country.

Overall, I really enjoyed this experience. It was great being able to combine some of my favorite interests, such as traveling and history, and being able to combine it with my medical career. I learned so much more about medicine and being a doctor, in addition to learning so much about Guatemala and Mayan culture. In New Orleans, there is a very large Spanish speaking population. As I spend more time in the clinic and hospital, I hope to use the knowledge I have gained to better serve the Spanish speaking patients of New Orleans and Louisiana.