

For my final clerkship of medical school, I completed a four-week rotation at Hospital Regional in Cusco, Peru. The dates of my international rotation were from 3/26/12 through 4/20/12. I went to Peru with the primary goal of improving my medical Spanish knowledge so I can better serve the Latino population as a physician. I also wanted to learn about the management of infectious diseases endemic to the Andes mountains and Amazon jungle regions and gain an understanding of the Peruvian health care system. I believe I accomplished these goals and I am pleased with my international clerkship experience.

I spent the first week of the rotation on the infectious disease service. I typically arrived at 7:00 AM to assist the residents with their preparations prior to the morning patient rounds. The rounds lasted approximately two hours and always included at least one infectious disease attending physician and one pulmonologist, given the high volume of patient's with pulmonary tuberculosis. The physicians emphasized teaching during rounds and were receptive to my questions and comments. Several patients on the inpatient infectious disease service had mucocutaneous leishmaniasis. Since this type of leishmaniasis is related to my chosen specialty of otolaryngology, Dr. Manuel Montoya, head of the infectious disease department, spent significant time teaching me about the epidemiology of the disease and the hospital's treatment protocols. After morning rounds, I would spend the afternoon in the clinic with the infectious disease providers.

During my second week at Hospital Regional, I was fortunate to participate in an Operation Smile surgical campaign. A team of plastic surgeons, anesthesiologists, dentists and ancillary staff, all of whom were Peruvian, came to Hospital Regional for a four-day campaign offering free cleft lip and palate surgeries. The team completed 60 procedures during the mission and I served as first surgical assistant for more than 15 cases. I contributed at the level of a resident by completing the operative reports, bringing the patients to the recovery unit and informing the pediatricians of any pertinent surgical details and special post-operative instructions. The campaign allowed me to gain exposure to a uniquely high number of facial plastic surgery cases and greatly expanded my understanding and interest of this sub-specialty.

My wonderful experience with the Operation Smile campaign was followed by an interesting week with one of the hospital's otolaryngologists. I observed three days in the clinic and spent two days in the operating suite. Several patients seen in clinic traveled to Cusco from remote regions of the Andes and Amazon jungle and presented with very advanced pathology. One patient was diagnosed with a fist-sized pleomorphic adenoma of the parotid gland. Additionally, in one clinic day I observed three patients with Le Fort fractures of the skull, a type of traumatic fracture I had not previously seen in the United States. In the operating room, I assisted the surgeon in the following cases: thyroidectomy, septoplasty, mandibular fracture repair, and dacryocystorhinostomy.

The final week of my Peruvian clerkship was spent in the village of Pampallacta, a rural community approximately three hours from the city of Cusco.

Members of this community are subsistence farmers, speak Quechua, the ancient language of the Incas, and struggle with numerous issues related to their isolated location. Poverty is widespread in the rural communities of the Peruvian Andes as a result of limited access to health care services, education and clean water, among many other complex issues. Many children suffer from malnutrition and in the village health clinic I worked with the nursing staff to educate the families about healthy nutrition practices and I helped to distribute a government-issued vitamin supplement. I also accompanied the nursing staff on house visits to ensure that all the children in the community were up-to-date on their vaccinations. In addition to working in the clinic, my experience in Pampallacta was highlighted by a home stay with a generous local family, participating in the potato harvest and teaching an English class at the village elementary school.



