

Medical Spanish and Clinical Skills in Costa Rica

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Through the Brody Scholars Summer Enrichment Program, I was able to spend three weeks in Atenas, Costa Rica volunteering at a local medical clinic. In this clinic, I was able to practice so many of the skills I had developed through Doctoring this past year, and I was able to modify those skills to fit the needs of the patients. With each patient, I measured their temperature, pulse, oxygen saturation, and blood pressure. I filled out the beginning of their charts, spoke with them in Spanish about their chief complaint, and followed along with the physician taking patient history and performing physical exams. I worked closely with the physician at the clinic to understand diagnosis and treatment, and I was able to do all of this in Spanish. I saw everything ranging from hypertension to Dengue Fever to a traumatic scalp injury. I was able to assist the physician with two different cases of stitches and with a traumatic hand injury. I also assisted with administering several IVs.

In addition to this, I was able to sit in on various meetings between the physician and local pharmacists where they explained the medicine they were promoting as well as its effectiveness and potential side effects. This helped me to gain an understanding about some of the medications commonly used in Costa Rica.

After volunteering in a clinic in Costa Rica, my Spanish skills—general speaking skills and medical Spanish skills—developed tremendously. Due to the growing number of Spanish-speaking patients in the United States, I knew how important this skill is and I am so glad I was able to develop it.

Living with a host family was such an incredible experience as well. I was able to learn about the culture so directly, and learn about the various, intricate ways in which culture impacts habits and health. I have a much more open mind after living with my host family, and I've learned how important it is to exhibit cultural humility when working with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

I developed such valuable experience volunteering in Costa Rica and I know I will be able to apply these skills in the United States in clinics when working with Spanish-speaking patients. In addition to all of this incredible medical experience, I truly enjoyed experiencing Costa Rican culture. I was also able to take a trip to Tortuga Island for a day, where I went snorkeling and spent time on the beach. And I loved the afternoons that I would spend just grocery shopping with my host mom and sister. Overall, the trip was incredibly fulfilling and I am so grateful to the Brody family for helping make this summer the best one of my life!