

# Medical Education and Rural Healthcare in Quito, Ecuador: Building Cultural Humility through Spanish Language Immersion

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## Objectives

Four students from UMass Medical School created a new partnership between the University of Massachusetts Medical School and Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial (UTE) with the following goals:

- Learning and practicing Spanish through instruction and immersion
- Understanding medical education in Ecuador
- Cultural immersion through living with host families
- Learning the functions of a rural health clinic in a low-resource setting, including a mobile health program
- Participating in data collection for PURE research study



## Medical Education in Ecuador

Medical Education in Ecuador begins directly after high school. Our experience in Ecuador enabled us to partner with students and medical faculty at UTE to learn how medical education in Ecuador prepares students to meet the unique needs of a diverse indigenous and urban population in Ecuador. Medical education is six years followed by one to two years of mandatory rural service at a hospital such as the one we visited and shadowed at in Zumbahua.



Photos courtesy of Cameron Thomson, MS2

## Zumbahua: Claudio Benati Centro de Salud

- Rural community hospital in highlands of Ecuador started by Dr. David Chiriboga (UMass Medical School)
- Language spoken by the local population is a mix of Spanish and indigenous Quichua
- Mobile health program conducts biweekly home visits in Zumbahua where community health workers deliver prescriptions and follow up on chronically ill patients long-term. This community health program expands access to patients who face barriers to healthcare access, including transportation and cost.



## PURE research study

The Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) study is conducted in 18 countries, with UTE studying Ecuador's unique and diverse population. This study aims to track various anthropometric, environmental and social determinants of health. We participated in data collection efforts at a community clinic. Factors investigated include major cardiovascular risk factors, lifestyle modification, psychosocial factors and community stressors.



## Host Family and Cultural Immersion

- Each student lived with a different host family in Quito, enabling us to immerse ourselves in their daily experiences



## Educational Trips

- A visit to the Ecuadorian Amazon taught us about the megadiversity in this region. We explored traditional healing plants and learned from experts in traditional medicine.



- The government of Ecuador supports sustainable tourism as a mechanism to increase awareness of indigenous ways of life, and to provide a means of income that supports traditional livelihoods.
- UTE conducts scientific research on traditional medicine in order to promote awareness of and provide an evidence base for these practices



- A traditional *Pamba Mesa* with local food staples, including various types of corn, yuca, and potato

## Conclusions

- Cultural and Spanish language immersion can provide students with an invaluable learning experience to build cultural humility and language skills. These lessons can be applied to our patient interactions in the US, where there is a sizeable Spanish-speaking population.
- The pilot year of this program shows that a deeper relationship can be developed between UMass and UTE for future collaborations



## Next Steps

- Develop medical Spanish curriculum for UMass students to continue practicing language skills
- Explore the possibility of creating a Flexible Clinical Experience at the hospital in Zumbahua for third and fourth year students
- Create an exchange program to enable students from UTE to rotate at UMass



## Acknowledgements:

- Dr. Michael Chin
- Dr. David Chiriboga
- The Global Health Pathway and IMEP for supplying generous travel funding
- Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial (Susana Hidalgo, Drs. Manuel Baldwin and Marco Fordasini)