

Two Weeks of Reproductive Crime Fighting

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As I conclude my second week here at Manos Abiertas, a midwifery and women's clinic in Guatemala, I am still shocked about how much I've learned already from this opportunity. This isn't an ordinary internship. We don't sit at a desk and play sudoku pretending to be busy. At 9am sharp everyday there is always someone that needs help, whether it's pediatric care, a prenatal appointment, or a birth.

Manos Abiertas is located in Ciudad Vieja, just outside of Antigua. Since Antigua is a common spot for tourists and backpackers, Ciudad Vieja is where most local Guatemalans live. The clinic offers various fields of women's health, such as gynecological appointments, family planning appointments, prenatal care, postnatal care, and births conducted by the midwives.

My first couple of weeks here has been an adjustment. Everything I do, from the language I speak to the way I act is completely different when adapting to the culture. I came to Antigua early to do a language immersion program, which helped significantly. Although my Spanish isn't perfect, I am practicing and learning more everyday.

I usually sit in during appointments and watch what the doctors do and listen to what the patient needs. I have been taking weight and blood pressure at each appointment so far, but the amount I have seen in only a few weeks has been very rewarding. I have seen numerous Pap smears, IUD insertions, hormonal injections, and was in the room while a woman was having contractions after her water broke. I will also be assisting in a few births in the next coming weeks.

I find it most rewarding to listen to what women have to say and the role of masculinity in their culture. In Guatemala, abortion is illegal. If a woman is raped it is her fault. Most women who come here haven't received proper sexual education. It is why women prefer shots as a form of birth control instead of the pill, to hide any evidence that they are on birth control. It is why we couldn't help the indigenous woman who came into our clinic seeking an abortion after she had been raped and couldn't afford a fourth child. There's a saying here that states "Machismo mata los mujeres todos los dias." Patriarchy kills women every day.

My expectations for this summer include assisting in a few births and improving my Spanish more to take an active approach to this clinic. I will soon begin creating a project that will help improve the clinic as part of my internship. With a better understanding of the culture I intend to try to pitch a therapeutic program for women who are struggling to provide for their families or women who need a safe place to come to talk.

Overall, my greatest advice for people seeking an internship is to **do what makes you uncomfortable**. You will learn the most from it. I am covered in mosquito bites and I haven't taken a hot shower in weeks, but all the work I have been doing is worth it.