Overview of Nicaraguan Healthcare System

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America, yet it remains one of the most sparsely populated with the majority of its population living in major cities. Unfortunately, this means 73% of households in rural areas have an unsuitable water supply, 66% have no electricity service, and 70% of the country’s garbage is uncollected creating conditions of poor hygiene and sanitation. Additionally, 35-40% of the population lack access to health services.

Health services in Nicaragua are primarily provided by the Ministry of Health (MINSA) through the public sector and financed by taxes. This system ultimately covers 70% of the population with the remaining 30% covered by the Nicaraguan Social Security Institute (INSS), and private health care services. An overview of the public healthcare structure is provided below.

One of the strengths of the Nicaraguan health system, and its primary solution to rural health care inaccessibility, is its structure is provided below.

MINSA Flow Chart

Project Aims

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in April of 2010, Worcester’s Hispanic and Latino population was 20.9%. With a rise from 9.4% in 2010 to 10.8% in 2015 in Worcester County, approximately 1 out of every 10 locally served patients are Spanish speaking. In an effort to better equip UMass students to serve the growing Latino population, a partnership was established between the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua-León and University of Massachusetts Medical School.

As public medical schools, both institutions share a strong commitment to community health and public service. Under the guidance of Dr. Olga Valdman, Dr. Jorge Yarzebski Sr. and Dr. Michael Chin, two GHP students (Charles J. Nesparrak and Jonathan Q. Quang MS3) spent their 2015 immersion experience in León successfully learning clinical Spanish skills, understanding the structure of national healthcare, assisting physicians in local Centro de Saluds (Community Health Centers) and performing a literature review on current teen pregnancy interventions in Nicaragua.

This year six UMass medical students continued with the second year of the partnership, including 3 GHP first-year students: Noah Rohrer, Supreetha Gubbala and Anthony Tran with an additional goal of donating AHA CPR teaching kits and teaching hands-only CPR to local UNAN medical students.

Experience Summary

- Attended 1 week of intensive Spanish language immersion classes followed by daily, individualized classes
- Instructed second year medical students currently in their cardiovascular block in hands-only CPR
- Attended lectures, small group tutorials/seminars, and physical diagnosis sessions pertaining to each of the gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, and respiratory blocks
- Shadowed and assisted medical teams at various Puesto de Salud satellite rural clinics

Objectives

- Gain a broader understanding of the universal healthcare system in low-resource settings
- Deepen our appreciation for the barriers patients of lower socioeconomic status encounter within satellite rural health clinics
- Develop our ability to build effective cross-cultural doctor-patient relationships to better serve local Latino populations
- Improve Spanish language skills

Conclusions

- UMass medical students with little to no Spanish language skills can successfully gain beginners-intermediate speaking levels and clinical skills through this structured program
- Significant exposure to tropical and community medicine can be gained from shadowing and assisting in local Puesto De Saludos (Community Health Centers)

Next Steps

- Continue fostering Spanish language skills by working with local Worcester patient populations at the Rey’s House, Worcester Free Clinic Coalition, and Family Health Center of Worcester
- Maintain UMASS GHP partnership with UNAN to ensure future 1st year medical students can be provided same opportunity
- Create guidebook to living and working in Nicaragua for future medical students who are traveling to Nicaragua
- Exploring possibility of creating and securing a tropical medicine rotation at UNAN for 3rd and 4th year UMass medical students
- Explore possibility of creating student exchange with UNAN for local 2nd year students to visit UMass

Acknowledgements

- Funding provided by the Global Health Pathway, University of Massachusetts Medical School
- Dr. Michael Chin, Dr. Jorge Yarzebski, Dr. Olga Valdman
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua Leon:
  - Dr. Carlos Ortiz
- Hospital Escuela Oscar Danilo Rosales Argüello (HOEDRA) and Centro de Salud Satellite Clinics