

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY MEDICAL PRACTICUM REPORT

January 2024

The 38th Medical Practicum returned for the fourth consecutive time to underserved, Maya populations in the Baja Verapaz region of Guatemala. For the second year in a row, this Manchester University short-term experience in global health was based in the remote village of Vista Hermosa. Our local partner Fundación para el Desarrollo del Norte AQ'AB'AL (FUNDENOR) again connected us with the Ministry of Social Assistance and Public Health (MASPAS) health care provider, as well as with the Community Councils of Urban and Rural Development of Guatemala (COCODES) of the 42 surrounding communities that took turns receiving attention at our clinic.

Our group from the United States included 11 undergraduate students, 1 pharmacogenomics graduate student, 2 fourth-year pharmacy students, 1 fourth-year medical student, 3 physicians, 1 physician assistant, 1 certified nurse midwife, 1 doctor of midwifery, 1 pharmacist, and 2 dentists. Guatemalan group members included 2 dentists, 6 FUNDENOR development workers, 2 MASPAS nurses, 5 MASPAS auxiliary nurses, 1 psychologist, and 8 interpreters (English-Spanish and Spanish-Mayan languages). In addition, the Non-Governmental Organization Alas joined us for a morning to place birth control implants. We again felt safe and welcomed in the rural, communities with whom we worked, comprised of both Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' Maya.

Although this trip is not just about numbers, some quantitative metrics can be useful: 1,031 medical consultations, 382 dental patients (442 tooth extractions), 359 lab tests on-site, and 2,423 prescriptions. We tested glucose, HbA1c, chlamydia, hemoglobin, urinalysis, pregnancy, and SARS-CoV-2. Our midwifery specialists' close work with local nurses was especially fruitful, with MASPAS again processing the Pap tests. Donations from 27 U.S. individuals, businesses, and organizations, and Medical Practicum Endowment earnings provided the \$28,948 used for medicines and medical/dental items obtained at substantially reduced costs, with extra left remaining with FUNDENOR to support health clinics in its work with the COCODES.

The population's access to health care seemed better than in the previous year, perhaps enabled by the magnitude higher prices for the locals' cardamon crop. The pleasant, unusually hot, and dry weather meant less of the nuisance of mud, although the topic of climate change often arose during conversations. Early on January 15, we felt the collectively held breath of the country finally exhale when the new president was officially sworn in after about a 12-hour delay. Trip and clinic logistics were relatively smooth, resulting from collaboration with FUNDENOR, much hard work, and good fortune. To date, 34 former medical practicum students have returned as providers on the trip.

In summary, the 2024 Medical Practicum based in Vista Hermosa, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala provided service and a short-term experience in global health that were faithful to the Manchester tradition of service and learning.

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