

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY MEDICAL PRACTICUM REPORT
January 2023

The 37th Medical Practicum, a Manchester University short-term experience in global health, returned to the Baja Verapaz region of Guatemala to attend to underserved, Maya populations in and around the remote village of Ríbaco. Our local partner Fundación para el Desarrollo del Norte (FUNDENOR) AQ'AB'AL connected us with Ministry of Social Assistance and Public Health (MASPAS) health care providers and with the Community Councils of Urban and Rural Development of Guatemala (COCODES) in the microregion.

Our group from the United States included 12 undergraduate students, 3 physicians, 2 physician assistants, 1 certified nurse midwife, 2 pharmacists, and 1 dentist. Guatemalan group members included 3 dentists, 6 FUNDENOR development workers, 1 MASPAS nurse, 6 MASPAS auxiliary nurses, and 7 interpreters (English-Spanish and Spanish-Mayan languages). The rural, communities with whom we worked, a mixture of Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' Maya, welcomed us to the region, where freedom from *ad libitum* cell phone service, electricity, water, familiar foods, and home comforts gave us freedom to be more mindful and present in the moment. Focusing on conversations, sights, sounds, smells, touches, and even discomforts created powerful experiences, which were especially impactful after the physical distancing and decreased human contact of the preceding, three pandemic years.

Although this trip is not just about numbers, some can be informative: 1,452 medical consultations; 199 dental patients (272 tooth extractions); 256 lab tests on-site; and 2,605 prescriptions. Our testing included glucose, HbA1c, chlamydia, hemoglobin, urinalysis, pregnancy, and SARS-CoV-2, with MASPAS processing Pap tests. Donations from 49 U.S. individuals, businesses, and organizations, and Medical Practicum Endowment earnings, provided the \$29,688 used for significantly reduced-cost medicines and medical/dental items. Extra medicines and clinic supplies remained with FUNDENOR to support its other health clinics in conjunction with the COCODES.

With the shade of three previous pandemic years coloring all advance planning, our group had zero positive COVID cases during the 20-day trip. Required COVID vaccinations, careful use of masks when traveling, and certainly some good luck, resulted in no need to implement the prepared quarantine and isolation plans.

Along with our pre-trip education on cultural humility and *Ethical Challenges in Short-Term Global Health Training*, we also learned much from our FUNDENOR partners before, during, and after the trip. Further, the shadowing and mentorship provided by our healthcare professionals, four of whom had been undergraduate participants on the trip themselves, was superior. So many people contributed to this unique opportunity to learn and to grow as an individual.

In summary, the 2023 Medical Practicum to Ríbaco, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala continued the Manchester tradition of service in a way that we believe was worth the effort.

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