

In the midst of my third year of medical school, I had the pleasure and opportunity to help pioneer an exchange program between the University of Minnesota and Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM)- one of the most prestigious medical schools in all of Latin America. As a Latina with a ton of family in Mexico, I have dreamed of attending UNAM my whole life and finally, I was in a position to make that dream a reality. Although I have spent a significant part of my life in Mexico, nothing could have prepared me for the sensation that swallowed me whole my first day working in the emergency department.

The barrack-like quarters were crowded with patients crying for overextended doctors. Like beacons of clarity in an otherwise blurry scene, doctors weaved between rows of mattresses treating sick babies and diseased adults alike. I watched the exhausted physicians, admiring their selfless mission to treat every patient in the cramped hospital. A rush of energy surged through me as I rekindled my dormant dream of practicing medicine in an international setting. I was surrounded by pure chaos, but somehow I felt calm. At that moment, I realized that my time here would be invaluable. I latched onto a friendly Mexican medical student and quickly learned how to draw labs, transport patients and document visits with decrepit typewriters. After my first day in the large public hospital I had seen dialysis patients with potassiums of 10, an AIDS patient with a large caseating granuloma on his face and a 20-year old with severely deforming inflammatory breast cancer. It became very clear that I would be seeing things here that I would otherwise not be exposed to in my training.

My time in Mexico City was divided between two emergency medicine departments that specialized in medical and traumatic emergencies. The first was Hospital General de Mexico- a large public hospital that serves patients that have otherwise fallen through the cracks of the socialized medical system. People travel from around the entire country for treatment and for this reason, would wait until the last possible moment to be seen by a physician.. When one thinks of an urban hospital in a developing country, a place like Hospital General de Mexico comes to mind. There is a subway stop dedicated to this hospital campus, and the surrounding area is crowded with food vendors and a line of patients that extends down the block. Here, I saw some of the most interesting medical cases I think I will ever see. I met a man who, despite experiencing a thermal burn of his entire right arm, complained of no pain because he had been living with Leprosy for most of his life.

The second hospital I worked at was named Hospital Xoco, and it received the majority of the trauma that was seen in Mexico City. This hospital was in a quieter part of the city and it was relatively calm around the hospital. This hospital more resembled the emergency departments that I am familiar with, however there were stark contrasts

between both the pathology and the medical treatments practiced. Here, we frequently saw pedestrian vs car accidents that left people unrecognizable to their loved ones. A woman was brought to Xoco because during a 7.3 earthquake, she was pinned beneath a stone wall. I cannot even count the number of men I treated with brain bleeds from being assaulted by blunt objects.

Although I know that I will never forget the lessons I learned in the emergency departments of these two Mexican hospitals, I am forever-grateful for the people that I met during this journey. My new mentors that took me under their wings and took time to teach me, as well as the residents that took a chance with the American girl and invited me to get-togethers, will always remain close to my heart. I am hopeful that I will return to visit my new colleagues, but in the meantime, I will apply what I learned to Mexico to my patients here in the US.

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Hospital affiliations with UNAM: there are numerous hospitals that are affiliated with UNAM in Mexico City. Depending on your specialty of interest, you may choose to go to a private, premier research institution such as Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Medicas y Nutricion. Or, if you are interested in exploring a Mexican public hospital you may choose to spend time at Hospital General de Mexico. There are also pediatric hospitals that are available. Dr.Graue arranges all of your rotations for you after you discuss what you are interested in. I know that some of my classmates chose to do laboratory research as well, so that is also an option.

Do you need to know Spanish? Yes. I mean, to get the most out of the experience, I would say absolutely. You can always do research, which does not require a command of the Spanish language. However, most of the doctors that I worked with in the public hospitals did not speak any English. So do not expect to be speaking english with your medical colleagues!

Where to live: My significant other and I lived in a neighborhood called Escandon. It is close to Condesa, which is expensive and it is close to Roma, which is a fun neighborhood. I would recommend living close to the hospital you will be at, or at least living close to a subway stop/metrobus.

Do I need a car? No. Driving in Mexico City is INSANE. However, it is pretty easy to get around with public transportation. When you arrive to DF, get a metrobus card from one of the metrobus stations. You can put money on this card at any metrobus station (but not at subway stations for some reason). This card also works for subway rides. You can buy tickets for the subway, but the line is always long and it takes forever. It is really easy/cheap to take buses outside the city for weekend trips to Cuernavaca, San Miguel de Allende, Puebla, etc. I would highly recommend doing this for two reasons; first there are some really beautiful places just as stone's throw from DF. Second, if you are anything like me, I sometimes needed a break from the DF chaos!

Finances: Mexico is CHEAP! At least the food is cheap. Rent for a nice 2 bedroom apartment in a nice area was \$600 USD. Groceries for the week were about \$30-50. You can get a delicious lunch from a restaurant for about \$4 USD. However clothes/technology/gym memberships/American-made things are more expensive in DF.