

ELECTIVE INTERNATIONAL APPE ROTATION IN ECUADOR & COSTA RICA

Spanish Immersion - Community Health Outreach - Pharmacy Placements

Course Director: Rory Foster, MA Counseling, Common Ground International

Rotation Dates: 6-week blocks beginning in June/July of every year¹ (typically block 2 for most programs).

This elective course is an international pharmacy experience that integrates a Spanish immersion program into the APPE structure. It consists of home stays with Ecuadorian and Costa Rican families, intensive classroom instruction in Spanish, public health outreach and clinical care in resource-poor communities in Costa Rica, and pharmacy placements in small retail pharmacies around the Heredia province. It is for students who are passionate about providing preventive health education and care to disadvantaged patients in the United States or abroad and who are committed to improving their Spanish language skills.

Eligible Students:

- PharmD students (APPE Phase)

Rotation description:

This rotation includes several key elements:

- **Intensive classroom instruction in Spanish.** In small groups (typically 3-4 students), students will study medical and general conversational Spanish. Classes are taught by local professionals who are experienced Spanish teachers. Classes are organized according to students' Spanish proficiency.
- **Work alongside Costa Ricans in a local pharmacy.** Students will work in local pharmacies 2-3 days per week. The specific responsibilities that the student has in the pharmacy depends heavily on the student's Spanish language skills (and is at the discretion of the supervising Costa Rican pharmacist or owner), but the pharmacy placements usually include: learning the pharmacy system in Costa Rica and the generic medications used, comparing and contrasting pharmacist roles and responsibilities in Costa Rica vs. in the United States, patient counseling as the student's Spanish allows, and assisting the pharmacy team in whatever is needed on a given day. It is common for students to take patient vital signs, give injections, and research topics assigned by supervising pharmacist.
- **Preventive health educational talks (*charlas*).** Students will work in small, inter-disciplinary teams, along with medical, physician assistant, pharmacy and nursing students and professionals. Together, they will prepare and present a variety of educational talks to impoverished and underserved communities. Typically, these *charlas* focus on nutrition, drug or alcohol problems, general hygiene, oral health, prenatal care, injury prevention, health maintenance, immunizations, STIs or other preventive health topics. Among the sites that students may visit are House of Hope (Vocational rehab center women who were previously sex workers), GCEC (local school), El Alfarero Comunidad Terapéutica (a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center), and La Carpio (a marginalized community of

¹ Dates may be flexible to meet your rotation block needs. Contact Rory for more details: rfoster@commongroundinternational.com

Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica). Students' presentations are coordinated by Common Ground International, in close cooperation with House of Hope, GCEC, El Alfarero and other local humanitarian organizations.

- **Health care seminars and related readings.** Common Ground International hosts a series of seminars and lectures, in which local professionals are invited to speak about common public health problems in Ecuador and Costa Rica, the national health care systems, health disparities, use of home remedies and medicinal plants and barriers to medical care in under-served populations. Students will be assigned a Handbook and several articles that focus on cultural aspects of health care in Latin America and various ethical challenges that arise when medical teams provide health care abroad.
- **Hospital tours.** Students will have the opportunity to visit local public and private hospitals and clinics, in order to learn more about the facilities, the providers and the standards of care.
- **Host families.** Home stays with a local host family are a crucial component of the language and cultural immersion experience. These families are caring, knowledgeable, supportive of our students and non-English speaking.

Why this elective?

In the coming decades, in almost every geographic region and every health care setting, pharmacists will be asked to care for diverse populations of patients. This *Spanish Immersion* elective prepares pharmacists for their careers in several ways. Students who complete this elective will be able to communicate more confidently with Spanish-speaking patients. Students will graduate with a heightened awareness of, and respect for, their patients' family and cultural values. Students will understand the value of multi-cultural and inter-disciplinary health care provider teams. And students will have seen and experienced how the social, environmental, language-related, community and economic backgrounds of their patients contribute to health disparities. Perhaps most important, students who complete this elective are likely to leave with a renewed sense of confidence and optimism because this course combines classroom instruction, self-study, pharmacy placements, community visits and *charlas*, students will see the positives --- how dedicated teams of bilingual and culturally-aware professionals can work together to improve the health of patients and communities.

Prerequisites

All Spanish levels are welcome on the rotation, but true beginners may not have the same opportunities on the rotation as others with a higher Spanish proficiency. In line with our Mission Statement (see attached) - all students will actively prepare for this rotation in the months preceding travel.

Evaluation

Students will be graded on either a pass-fail basis or merit basis (depending on program requirements). Assignment of grades will be based upon completion of assignments, classroom participation, enthusiasm for speaking Spanish, and participation in the *charlas*, outreach clinics and health promotion activities.

Required Preparation and Reading:

- Prior to registering for this elective, all students must review and affirm the principles included in *The International Medical Spanish Immersion Program Mission Statement* (Attached). This document describes seven principles of ethical and respectful international health care, including: pre-departure preparation by all students and preceptors; collaboration with local providers and public health officials; proper supervision of students in all clinical settings; delivery of professional, patient-centered care; coordination of care with local providers, including attention to medical record-keeping, patient safety, appropriate use of pharmaceuticals and follow-up care; communication with local providers and other experts; and program evaluation.
- Other required reading and pre-trip activities:
 - Complete the [Medical Spanish Immersion Pre-Departure Course](#)
 - Suchdev P, Ahrens K, Click E, Macklin L, Evangelista D, Graham E. Model for Sustainable Short-Term International Medical Trips. *Ambulatory Pediatrics*. 2007; 7:317-320.
<http://www2.aap.org/sections/ich/CHIMPS%20Amb%20Peds%20July%2007.pdf>.
 - Green T, Green H, Scandlyn J, Kestler A. Perceptions of short-term medical volunteer work: A qualitative study in Guatemala. *BioMed Central Globalization and Health*. 2009; 5:4.
 - The *Medical Spanish Immersion in Costa Rica: Program Handbook*, provided by Common Ground International. The Handbook includes additional reading assignments and travel information to help student prepare for their work in Costa Rica.
- Reflective Writing: During the immersion elective, students will be required to reflect, and write, about one or more topics pertaining to what they have seen, heard, learned or felt. Among the possible topics: the commonalities of health, healthcare and humanism across countries and cultures; the challenges of providing ethical, sustainable medical care in foreign countries; international medical care as a catalyst for future work in resource-poor communities in the United States; and how living and working in Central America may provide an “adjusted lens” for viewing immigrant populations in the United States.

APPENDIX: Medical Spanish Immersion Program Mission Statement

Common Ground International aims to provide its Spanish Immersion Program participants with training and experiences that will help them develop their oral and intercultural communication skills such that they may effectively communicate with native Spanish speakers. Whether this is a personal or professional goal, we will help participants reach it through a combination of pre-departure preparation, language and cultural immersion at the program site, and service to the local community.

Common Ground International and all participants in its medical programs seek to provide ethical and respectful outreach services that address local health care needs in the host country. “Ethical and respectful” services will necessarily include:

- **Preparation:** Before travelling abroad, students and preceptors will acquire as thorough an understanding of local medical and public health needs as possible. Students and preceptors will also work to strengthen their Spanish language skills both before and during the program through reading, self-study and formal language courses. Whenever possible, Common Ground International will arrange meetings between students and local health care experts, in order to familiarize students with health care infrastructure, common health conditions and beliefs, and local health care practices.
- **Collaboration:** Our students, preceptors and program coordinators will work in close partnership with local providers, public health officials and humanitarian organizations. Participants will take part in existing efforts designed and guided by these local entities, so that they may gain a more comprehensive understanding of local health care and contribute to local health care priorities in a culturally appropriate and sustainable manner, despite short-term involvement.
- **Supervision:** In all clinical care settings, students and other trainees will be appropriately supervised. They will understand that they are working under, and not in place of, local health providers.
- **Patient-centered care:** Students and preceptors will understand their limits and will not practice outside their scope of training and competency. The fundamental tenets of medical professionalism, including humanism, respectful communication, confidentiality, empathy, integrity and putting patients’ interests first, are as applicable in resource-poor international settings as at home.
- **Integration:** Most students and preceptors will have only a short-term presence in the host country. Therefore, all volunteer clinical services must be coordinated and integrated with local medical, nursing, pharmacy and other providers. Attention must be paid to medical record-keeping, patient safety, appropriate use of pharmaceuticals, follow-up care and existing provider-patient relationships. Wherever possible, we will look for opportunities to work alongside local health care providers.
- **Communication:** We will communicate regularly with local health providers and other experts; feedback, reflection and critique are essential to ensure that the *charlas*, outreach activities and medical care services we offer are culturally appropriate and address local health care priorities.
- **Program evaluation:** Common Ground International will obtain regular feedback from directors of humanitarian organizations, community leaders, local health care providers, patients, students and other program participants, in order to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of all medical care and outreach activities.

We recognize the preceding components as forming an important connection between our educational and medical goals: While these elements are crucial to the ethics of medical engagement abroad, they are also an important guide for students and providers who seek to provide public health and medical care services in resource-poor cities and communities in the United States.