

MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE FUNDACIÓN OMAR MOSQUERA

This summer I decided to fly to Ecuador for a public Health Exchange with the "Fundación Omar Mosquera". The foundation is based in Riobamba, a city in the middle of a volcano landscape and provides free medical and dental assistance for everyone. The German organization Bvmd has a collaboration with this project and that's how I heard about it.

It's now almost the end of the year so I allow me to say that helping in the project was the best decision I made this year and maybe for the years to come. I really tried to find the best way to authentically share this unforgettable experience with you and decided to resume my stay with some pictures and the associated stories behind them.



Seeing this picture, you'll probably think I was leaving for a whole year or that I have real trouble picking the right clothes but the actual reason for my giant luggage is that I carried 32kg of medication from Germany to Ecuador. The medication was a donation from Medeor, organized thanks to Lukas Hermann and Johanna Spring with Unified for Health. Two cartons full of antibiotics, painkillers, nutrition adds, sun cream and all other type of stuff who arrived at my house five days before my departure. Fortunately, my first stop once arrived in Quito was Riobamba, so I didn't have to carry all that luggage across the country until it reaches the foundation. In the "Fundación Omar Mosquera" the patients got, after an examination with the doctors/students, the medicine they needed for free. The possibility to give the medication right away and not only a recommendation of what to buy in the nearest pharmacy felt very good to me. In some villages we visited, the

nearest pharmacy was half an hour away by car and the pharmacies are very expensive in Ecuador, that's why I think the possibility to give medication for free and right away increases a lot the compliance of the patient.



This picture is from my first week into the volunteering project. We spent the first week in the Salasaca Community, about one hour away from Riobamba. In Salasaca, a lot of people speak only Quechua, so we often needed a translator. In the background of the picture you see Susi (the other volunteer from Germany) talking to a patient and the Reina ("Queen") of the Community helping to translate.

The first days of attending, I wasn't totally confident with my clinical knowledge and had to look a lot of things up in the internet. But I quickly got used to it and the diseases turned out to be often very similar. In this Community, lots of patients came with articulation pain (mainly due to arthrosis), gastritis (due to their fatty and high-carb alimentation), headache (mostly due to their drinking habits: an average of one glass of water a day) which also explained the amount of urinary infection we diagnosed.

A thing I noticed during this first week and that was confirmed during my whole stay is that the people won't leave the "examination" with empty hands. For example, for the headache, if I would only recommend drinking more water, they would find another symptom until I'd give some medication for something. So, I can recommend informing yourself a bit about alternative medicine methods before the project. A typical patient profile for example is a 85-year old women whose knee has been hurting for 20 years and with her visit she expects you to make it go away. I couldn't recommend any operation nor give too many painkillers. So, I showed some daily exercises they could do, recommended to keep the articulation warm and gave some nutrition adds like Glucosamine or Calcium. Nothing that would change anything radically, but at least they went home happy.



This is a group photo taken during our week in Puerto Lopez. This was an unforgettable experience and a perfect opportunity for me to get to know the other volunteers better. Unless Susi they were all coming from Riobamba and most of them were odontology students. In Puerto Lopez, we were all staying in a little hostel together and just 10 minutes' by walk from the beach. This second week of the project wasn't only about attending to patients, but we also enjoyed a lot our free time together. We went surfing, visited the surrounding national parks, enjoyed the very "reggaetonish" nightlife on the beach and even went whale watching (a tour the community of Puerto Lopez offered us as a thank you)

From the examinations this week at the coast I remember being surprised about the amount of people with Diabetes Type II and hypertension in comparison to the Salasaca community. And a lot more children with a flu or stomach problems.



This picture was taken one morning as we arrived at one of the communities near Puerto Lopez. It's a very good thing the people there have a lot of patience. They never complained about waiting too long even though they sometimes were standing around for two hours. This is something I really noticed and appreciated, because we couldn't work faster but back home with those waiting times, there would be plenty of complaints and unsatisfied patients.



Here we are, in our third week talking about the anatomy of the genitals, STDs or contraceptives. The third week we attended in a school in Penipe. This week was very different to the others because we got to do some sexual education "Charlas" in the middle school classes (students from 12-16 years). Besides some vocabulary leaks here and there (talking in front of a class in Spanish is way more intimidating than to a single patient) we got very positive feedback. Susi and I also had the feeling the classes were always interested and had a lot of questions.



This is a photo taken during the big manifestation (el paro) who took place during my last week in Ecuador. The main reason for the national strike was the sudden raise of a 120% of the petrol prices. Three days before my flight the strikes were getting bigger and bigger so that every street was closed, even the main road going to Quito. There were blocks of trees, people, stones, glass or fire every 300m. No car could drive around in almost the whole country. In order to make it on time for my flight, I decided to take a bike to the airport (250km with more than 3000mt uphill). Thanks to Omar (the chief of the foundation) and his family I got a bike I could borrow for the next days and hand back to some of their friends living near the airport in Quito. But this is just a small gesture compared to everything they've done to make my time with the foundation great. So, this picture is also a way for me to again thank Omar and his wife for all the support and kindness they gave me during my stay in Riobamba.



And this last photo is maybe not exactly about the project but shows one of the breathtaking landscapes of Ecuador. Climbing up the Chimborazo (highest volcano in the country – 6233mt) was one of my goals for my time in Ecuador. For the duration of the project Susi and I were staying in a little house next to Omar's and every morning, we had a view on the impressive Chimborazo. So, I am very grateful and happy to have made it to the top at the end of my travel.

This climb was just the cherry on top of my trip because the one month of volunteering already would have been more than enough to call this an unforgettable and unique experience. I would definitely do it again and I can honestly recommend to everyone reading this resume to volunteer with the "Fundación Omar Mosquera".

Charlotte Reignier – October 2019.