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During my first year of medical school, I was enrolled in RWJMS' Medical Spanish program. I was placed in the "Intermediate-Low" section because, despite years of high school and college Spanish classes, I had difficulty holding a conversation and discussing health-care related topics. The course built upon this foundation of mine, refreshing my background knowledge and teaching me essential medical terminology and phrases. I was able to use these skills a few times through volunteering and clinical off-sites as a student doctor in the New Brunswick area. However, I still lacked the ability and confidence to speak Spanish with patients as well as I would have liked. It was with this goal in mind that I applied for the CES Medical School program this past summer: to improve my Spanish abilities for the benefits of my Latino and other Spanish-speaking patients.



Upon arriving at the program in Medellín, I was immediately immersed in a brand new culture that largely forced me to practice my Spanish out of necessity. Despite being the second-largest city in Colombia, it is not a major tourist destination, so many of the people there do not speak English. This required me to use and practice my Spanish in everything from taking cabs, to going to the grocery store, to planning weekend trips with my colleagues. Fortunately, Colombians are incredibly friendly and compassionate, so they were always very patient with me as I sometimes struggled to find the correct words or conjugations. This was especially the case with my beloved host mom, Cecelia, who I lived with during the program and with whom I would recount my daily activities over a home-cooked Colombian dinner. Over time, and with the aid of the course at CES, I became less shy and more skilled at holding conversations, making jokes, and navigating the City of Eternal Spring.

The program at Universidad CES was immensely helpful in improving my Spanish abilities and exposing me to Colombian medicine. During the dense two-week, 4-hour daily course in Spanish, I learned so much about the language and appropriate cultural customs. Our class was incredibly intimate, with just the four students from RWJMS and one medical student from Jefferson University enrolled. Our course, "Spanish for Foreigners", was extremely relevant and even tailored for us with curriculum that included medical terminology and patient-doctor etiquette. We were then able to use these skills at the hospital, completing rotations in Orthopedics, Radiology, Surgery, Emergency Medicine, Tropical Medicine and Catheterization.

My most memorable rotation at the hospital was the four-day span I spent in the Emergency Department. During this time, I was able to see and examine patients from a diverse background of socioeconomic classes, which gave me a great understanding for how the Colombian healthcare system is structured. I specifically connected with one older patient



experiencing chest pain, to whom I was able to ask questions and perform a cardio-pulmonary exam upon using my M1 PCM training. I was also able to make polite conversation with her family and understand her questions for the attending physician all in Spanish, which I never would have been able to do before the trip.

I am abundantly grateful for this opportunity to spend five weeks in Colombia, using my Spanish and gaining additional clinical exposure. Upon returning to New Jersey, I have already been able to use my medical Spanish skills from Colombian during the beginning of my M2 year. My Spanish-speaking patients have shown great appreciation for my attempts to communicate with them in their own language, and are always curious to ask where I learned to speak so well. Now in my M2 year, I have tested into the “Advanced” Medical Spanish course, and will continue to work hard to improve these abilities throughout my medical school and practicing career.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qnb7J5ubQNE&feature=youtu.be>

