Our trip for Colombia

Fordham University, the Jesuit university of New York, offers pre-health programs of study at all three of its New York campuses. Fordham College at Rose Hill (FCRH), located in Bronx, New York, is the largest undergraduate college and prepares the largest number of students for admission to medical school. Seven students and one professor from FCRH visited Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, a sister Jesuit university, in Cali in March 2015. Their post-trip reflections on their experiences in Colombia form the basis for the essays that follow.

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As medical science moves forward and new discoveries are made each passing day, it almost seems as if diseases are examined exclusively through a view grounded in the way physical chemicals and microorganisms react with one another. It is a world where healing is a science, perfected through a systematic understanding of our body’s chemical makeup. Yet, despite this widespread perspective, my immersion trip into the healthcare system and culture of Colombia has taught me that methods of healing deeply rooted in the traditions and history of the cultures in which they developed are still relevant within the medical community. Although one week may not be enough time for a premedical student such as myself to fully grasp an entire country’s approach to health care, in one week alone, I was still able to appreciate the enthusiasm that both the medical students and the doctors displayed towards their chosen careers. Despite limited resources, I observed how nurses, doctors, and medical students worked together in order to provide the best possible care to the patients, making great efforts to treat the patient with compassion and respect.

A great emphasis was made on treating the patient as human beings, while consistently remaining sensitive to their beliefs and emotions. Through a lecture on semiology, I learned that the key is empathy, and for doctors to continuously foster and maintain this sense of empathy throughout their careers. Through learning about the indigenous community and traditional medicine, I was able to appreciate how medical students are taught to have a multicultural and open-minded approach, as efforts are made to introduce modern medicine to indigenous communities and to incorporate facets of indigenous medicine to hospitals to improve patients’ comfort level. Furthermore, through my interaction with patients at public hospitals, I found that even though several patients had to travel vast distances or were facing economic struggles, they were still able to maintain a sense of resilience and strength, despite the troubles that they faced. Through my trip, I found that Colombia is a beautiful country where many developments have been made in the
field of health and many more plans for advancement are being made to further increase patients’ access to health care. The medical students and professors I had the wonderful opportunity to interact with had a deep understanding of both the advantages of their health care system and the necessary improvements that still need to be made. It was a great privilege to be able to be a part of a world where there is so much care and genuine determination to heal all human beings despite any setbacks, even if it was only for a week.