Tasnima Elahi

A person once said, “Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity. We can choose to use this force constructively with words of encouragement, or destructively using words of despair. Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble.” Being able to communicate with other people, and actually having conversations with them, are some of the most important skills that a person can have. Through the Community Pre-Health Program at the Javeriana University not only did I have the opportunity to learn about the culture, healthcare system, and the history of Colombia, but I was also reminded of how important it is for a physician to be able to effectively communicate with his/her patients. After attending several conferences that were hosted by professors, and conversing with the medical students at the Javeriana University I learned about the type of emphasis that was put on the humane aspect of being a physician. The health program at Javeriana University emphasizes spending time to talk to patients. It emphasizes the value in treating patients like humans instead of illnesses that need to be cured. My conversations with professors and medical students reminded me that being a physician is not just about ordering laboratory tests, and prescribing medicine.

Instead, it is about talking with patients, making them feel comfortable, and helping them when they feel the most vulnerable. This humane approach to medicine is incredibly valuable to me, since it has reminded me how important it is for me to be able to empathize with patients as a medical professional. Through this service abroad program I was also able to learn about the alternative medicines present in Colombia. I had the opportunity to learn about the indigenous medicine, and the spiritual medicine that certain groups in Colombia use. I was reminded of how important it is for a physician to be religiously tolerant, and respect other cultures. I was also very impressed to see the kind of effort that is put into reaching out to the impoverished communities in Colombia by the health program at Javeriana University. I learned about the different university programs that are available to help communities with their problems, and to help improve their conditions. Furthermore, through our community visit to Las Palmas (Comuna 18) I was able to witness firsthand the kind of effort professors and medical students put in to teach healthy lifestyle tips to communities. This service abroad program has been a valuable experience for me. Not only was I able to learn about the culture, and explore this beautiful country, but I was also reminded of why I want to become a physician. I appreciate the kind of emphasis the health program at Javeriana University places on effectively communicating with patients, empathizing with them, and hope that someday I too will have the opportunity to apply this human approach to medicine as a practicing physician.