My trip to Cali began as a vested interest in international medicine. What aspects of health care extend to all parts of the world? But in my search to understand the differences between healthcare in the United States and Colombia, I came back realizing that the faces of pain, poverty, happiness and health are universal—regardless of race, religion or citizenship.

What did impact me was the importance health care practitioners in Colombia placed on empathy and communication. Our trip to Club Noel, the only children’s hospital in Cali, confirmed that empathy is central to healthcare professionalism. Walking into the hospital, I thought I would be overwhelmed by the sight of sick children, the sound of their cries, and the downtrodden looks on parent’s faces. What I noticed instead was the astounding sense of drive and ambition of everyone who worked there. An inpatient unit that graciously accommodated an overflow of patients by extending into the waiting room, or the quick instinct of the medical students to go over to a crying baby and play with them are only a couple of examples of the kindness that is common in the every-day life of these doctors and patients.

The conferences we attended stressed the importance of narrative medicine as well as a truthful, honest and thorough
medical history. I am very grateful to be able to bring what I learned with me to the USA and into my future medical practices. For my experience, I thank the many wonderful doctors and soon-to-be doctors I have met at the University of Javeriana.