Hifza Ishtiaq

Colombia is the first country in South America that I had the opportunity to travel to and I have to say I loved it. As we drove through the different neighborhoods of Cali I realized that everyone everywhere is the same; we are all alike in more ways than we think. Everybody was going about their daily routines, trying to earn a living, dropping their kids off to school, waiting to see a doctor in a clinic or just enjoying a cup of coffee. Travelling to various countries, especially those that have a different culture from ours, allows a person to not only observe the similarities that we all share but also to accept the differences that make all of us unique. I was very interested in seeing the public health system and the way in which healthcare is delivered to people in Colombia because countries approach their health care in different ways. I wanted to know how Colombia goes about its public health policies with regards to its culture and people. Upon learning that almost everyone has some sort of basic insurance was impressive because many countries do not have this policy in place. The system of having different tiers of medical centers was also a good idea because in this way the hospitals aren’t overcrowded due to minor health issues, which the smaller clinics can take care of. However, I think that big hospitals should not only be present in the cities but also in rural areas; that way people won’t have to travel such great distances for treatment. While talking to patients in the Children’s Hospital, a patient mentioned that her family lives some 6 hours away and that she had brought her child to Cali for treatment. I felt that such distances discourage people from pursuing treatment.

That is why to better the system even further, hospitals should also be present in the surrounding rural areas. The medical department at Javeriana University does a very good job at addressing the issue of health in poor areas. The university combines the social aspect and the medical aspect of health to deliver a medical curriculum that puts a great emphasis on giving back to others. And that is what medicine should be about. I really liked how early on in their medical education, the students were sent to serve underserved communities as a part of their education. In order to treat your patients effectively, it is important to understand what their background is and under what circumstances they live. I especially liked the rotation in which the students had to take look after a community of elderly people. While talking to the senior citizens, we came to the realization that not only were they poor but they also felt that they were on the outskirts of society; that their children had their own families to take care of and didn’t have much time and money for them. Through their activities not only were the medical students trying to improve the diets of these elderly people, but by bringing them together, they were also promoting a sense of belonging amongst the elderly. The students were aware of the limitations that those people faced and tried to work with those limitations while trying to come up with good solution.