Arequipa, Peru: Clinical and Cultural Immersion

Report #1
May 17, 2010

We arrived yesterday and were really tired from the 25 hour journey to get here! Father Alex met us at the airport to bring us to the Guest House where a delicious breakfast of eggs, ham and bread (pan) awaited. After a few hours to rest and adjust to the altitude, we travelled down into the city for a short tour around the Plaza des Armas and some coffee and sweets. We also visited the Super Mercado and loaded up on snacks. In the evening, we went to Mass and were greeted very warmly by the parish community.

Today we will have our orientation to Arequipa and tour the Parish mission facilities.

One of the Volcanos Chachani in the background
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Report #2
Monday, May 17

Today we had breakfast at 8am and it was delicious as usual, complete with fried eggs, bread, ham, an assortment of teas and coffee. After breakfast, we went to another building in the volunteer area and had an orientation to Peru from Father Alex. He discussed many things including the geography and people of Peru. The Andes mountain ranges make it difficult to unify the various communities scattered among the mountains and jungle areas; making it difficult to provide proper health care and other resources. Although it may be difficult to bring unity among the many villages, mountain communities, and territories, the main focus still seems to be to build bridges and break barriers between the groups. Togetherness is a component that is very overlooked in our society as most strive to be individual and independent, but here I see one big family, loving each other and helping one another in any way. I truly admire the servanthood mentality of Father Alex and the others who work within the mission in Arequipa.

After the orientation we went down to the clinic and had a tour where one of our own, Amanda, was seen by the doctor and received medicine for only 5 dollars! Health care is quite different here in many ways. The mission only charges about a third of the price of most services in town. Following the tour, we came back and had an amazing lunch that led into our siesta, which lasted much of the day, as we did not have anything planned until 6:30. It was nice to rest, read, and reflect a bit on all that we have seen, heard and experienced thus far. The sun sets between 5 and 6pm and we made it outside to see the beauty of the sun setting with the mountains in the background, truly a sight. Everyone here is so nice and kind, and although the language continues to be a barrier, love and service is a language that all can understand and appreciate.

Melissa Howard
Arequipa, Peru: Clinical and Cultural Immersion

Report #3
May 18, 2010

Hola! There is so much to take in here in Peru! Our house lady (Veronica) cooks some of the best food I have ever had! My favorite tradition in the morning is opening the front door of our guest house and staring at the peaks of Chachani and Misti mountains. What is really more interesting than the mountains and surrounding volcanos are the people in the town below. After breakfast we took a tour of the outer sectors of town. The farther up from Town Central we went, the poorer the people and sectors (areas of smaller communities) got. It is very shocking: toilets (silos) are a hole in the ground with tarps for walls, water is only accessible 1-2 hours a day from a community spigot, dirt roads are scattered with trash and the houses are all basically one small brick room. When we arrived back to our house before we all spread into the community for the day I realized our home was a mansion in this area!

I spent the remainder of the morning with another student in the soup kitchen, dicing potatoes and peeling carrots that went into the massive soup. When the food was cooked, it was put into buckets by sectors to be delivered. The food was delivered to individual people, as well as to volunteers who helped distribute the food to certain areas of town. The people were very friendly and accepting of all the help they could get. - Thomas

Hola mis amigos en los Estados Unidos!!! Like Thomas said, there are so many experiences to speak about and not enough words to describe them. Today I was able to work with the five year old children in the preschool/daycare next to our house. The children only spoke Spanish, and the language barrier was vast. We were able to play with them, and use as much Spanish as we knew. They, surprisingly, were great teachers and did not judge our lack of Spanish knowledge. They enjoyed our company so much and shared everything they could with us.

Today I was also given the opportunity to visit the clinic closer to town where approximately 150 patients are seen daily. I sat with the doctor and listened to him speak Spanish very fast to his patients. I could pick up very little, but could understand the gist of what the chief complaint was and therapeutic explanation the doctor gave in response. I was able to meet and listen to a traditional Quechua Peruvian woman. She was very interesting, sweet, and appreciative. The clinic visit was very interesting and provided me with a strong sense of community. - Sean

While this trip has merely begun, we have so much more to do and see. We look forward to every experience we can have and are excited to learn more Spanish. Adios for now!

Thomas Mangiacapre
UNCW Student Nurse
Cape Fear E.D. Tech
NHRMC Phleb. Tech II
Hola! Today of course has been wonderful like all the other days. I, along with Thomas, helped out in the school. We started out in the five year old class. These kids were beautiful and loved us! It was very hard to have a conversation with them because they spoke so fast and didn’t quite understand that we didn’t speak their language well. But we were able to teach the three year old class how to play duck-duck-goose, which is “pato-pato-cisne” in Spanish and they loved it! Yesterday two of us helped in the kitchen and delivered soup to many families throughout community. The driving here is much faster and NO strict rules for road so riding around the city is crazy! We met many Peruvians who always seem to smile and make you feel welcome. We also have siestas every day which means “nap” in Spanish and basically the whole community shuts down for two hours! There is so much more I could talk about but not enough space to type. Until next time mis amigos, Adios! - Janie

Hola from Peru! I have enjoyed every day we have been here. Today another student and I went on home visits. It was absolutely amazing the things we saw. Maria, the social worker, took us from house to house where we met the families, which were mostly women and children. The men were downtown looking for work. The most shocking thing I learned was that this community only has access to water one hour every day. I couldn’t believe this, as we take this for granted in our own country. I was also surprised by the houses that we visited. Many of them were tiny huts that were only one room. Many did not have furniture inside, not even a bed. Some people had to sleep on the dirt ground and appeared to be embarrassed to let us in to make a home visit. I felt like these people are so happy and grateful for what they have, and they have so little. Every one we met embraced us and tried to talk to us, which was a bit frustrating for me because I know very little Spanish. I am learning more and more everyday and look forward to more home visits and getting to know the Peruvian people. That is all for now! Ciao. - Holly
We have completed our first week of work in the mission activities. The students have been able to participate in lot of activities with the community, including many procedures and injections at the clinic (almost every patient get a shot~)

Some of the children are very developmentally delayed, given their poor nutritional status and lack of stimulation by the parents (students were able to see the nurses doing patient education in this regard.)

Today we head to Colca Valley for an overnight excursion. Yesterday we had few members of the group under the weather with the intestinal stuff (all part of the experience!); but everyone, while moving a little slow, seems fine. There is essentially 0 humidity here and it is so dusty we are seeing and experiencing first hand how the dry air takes a toll on the sinuses and respiratory systems and lots of URI stuff in the clinic.

One of the highlights for the students working at the clinic is being able to watch the dentist at work, he is very good about teaching and speaks some English.

The nurses are also very good about teaching and explaining everything they are doing.

Next week, students will continue to do home visits and work in the clinic and with the children at the day care. Given the time of year, there are lots of pediatric patients to be seen.

It makes a huge difference for the students to not be consumed with other school work. I highly recommend the May time frame in that regard. The group is getting very close and does a good job looking out for one another

More later

Kae
Monday, I went to the clinic and there were a lot of patients in the clinic but not many came into the treatment room. The clinic process starts with the admission and triage room where vitals are taken. The patients then sit back in the waiting room until the doctor calls them up to be seen. After they have seen the doctor, they take their prescription up front to get filled along with any supplies for treatment. Lastly, if needed, the patient will bring the supplies to the nurse in the treatment room where she will administer IM injections, clean wounds, etc. The process within the clinic seems to work very well and the simplicity of their records and charting seems to be an advantage because it cuts out a lot of middle men that could increase risk of medication errors or other complications.

While I was at the clinic, I also noticed how resourceful the nurses and other staff were as they were folding discarded sterile gloves, setting paper to make boxes for cotton balls and other items. This was really a great thing to see as it made me think of how wasteful we can be and how easy it is to throw things away without even thinking twice about it. Seeing this will make me more aware of how I use things and become more resourceful and less wasteful not only in nursing practice but in everyday life. I also noticed that all injections given are in the gluteal site and the technique is different than what we have learned in school. Seeing this will make me consult my textbooks more closely as I have seen different techniques used.

Sorry this is late!
Thanks, Melissa
It’s hard to believe we are wrapping up our second week here in the Parish. All of the students have been able to work in the treatment (topico) room with the nurses, and have done lots of wound cleaning and dressing changes, other procedures and of course lots of IM injections. They are learning new medicines from South America (even the ones we use have different names!)

Home visits as always are very powerful for students and have provided a good patient pool for OPTS. Yesterday afternoon we visited a school in a neighborhood even higher than we are (and closer to volcano and mudslide hazards) and did some basic assessment on the kids for the school. Students (now experts in taking assessments in Spanish) plotted the kids on growth charts, did some quick physical and developmental assessments, as well as health promotion (distributed toothbrushes and taught hand washing!) The community has no water access, so the kids each day get one glass of bottled water at the end of their school day in the afternoon we also distributed apples to the kids (healthy snacks!) Surprisingly, very few of the kids were out of range on the growth charts, however their nutritional status is still not good.

We will wrap up the "work" portion of the trip next Tuesday and then head to Cuzco and Machu Picchu...
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Report #8
May 29, 2010

Blog May 25th:

Every day in Peru has been different. From our first day on the job until today, we have experienced more than many could believe. This country is so amazingly majestic, yet so extremely poor in the area we are staying. It is hard to imagine such beauty surrounded by poverty and distress. Yet, the people of Arequipa continue to persevere and move forward day-by-day, as if there was no problem at all. They are connected by such strong ties of community and religion, the fabric of their daily lives that keeps it all together. I am amazed every time I meet someone new. Even though I cannot speak their language and communicate effectively in conversation, they greet me with open arms, a smile, and a kiss on the cheek. That, in itself, is peace. These people hope and pray for happiness. I believe that they have found it.

It is amazing to see in our own country, so advanced and structured in comparison, how we have transgressed as a society to forget the simple things that make us all human. To realize that there are others in this world with us, that we are not alone. If you want a lesson in humanity, it is these people. It is so strong and so powerful, it is hard to articulate. I can only hope that their hope will spread. I truly believe that is my reason for being here, to spread their hope. As Father Alex said to us (paraphrased, not quite exact), ‘It is not what we do here, it is the experiences that we take home and share that will help give peace to the world.’ I understand him more each and every day.

- Sean

As we pull up to a food drop off site the Peruvians come running to the van. You can tell they are so grateful for what they are receiving. The service is their only means of food for the day and it’s amazing to imagine how far they make it stretch. A Peruvian told us during a home visit that she chews coca leaves to suppress her appetite until she can get more food. When my stomach grumbled for lunch I felt so guilty saying to myself that I was hungry! My hunger was incomparable to those individuals we fed that day. Also as I looked out the window staring into the town it was hard to miss all the health hazards. I wonder how in the world there isn’t a great epidemic in the community! Trash lined streets, hundreds of dogs pooping everywhere, no A/C or heat, no running water to bathe, and some children were walking without shoes, without money for food that also means no money for toothpaste or brushes. When you couple that on top of their malnourishment, it makes me wonder if their immune systems are made of steel or if it is nearly diminished.

- TM

Thomas Mangiacapre
UNCW Student Nurse
Cape Fear E.D. Tech
NHRMC Phleb. Tech II
Hello from Arequipa, Peru!

We are into our second week and still loving it here. This week I have been on home visits and worked in the kitchen. We helped the cooks prepare food for the day with chopping potatoes, tomatoes and carrots. Then we rode with Adon to deliver the food to all the families. Their meals consisted of soup, pasta, and side of lettuce, onions, and tomatoes. For most of the families, these meals are all the food they will have for the whole day! The home visits are pretty interesting because they live in cedar block homes with little access to water and electricity. After visiting a few homes, I was overwhelmed with how different we live from these Peruvian people. Just sitting on the floor in their homes or outside talking makes me feel a sense of peace. They are so humble and accepting to anyone, no matter where they come from. We do not speak much Spanish so there is a huge language barrier but we still can smile and greet one another with small talk. And that is enough to show the love the community has for us. They are thankful for us helping their community through the variety of services, but we are so much more thankful for how they have influenced our group while spending time in their community daily! After two weeks living in Peru, I can definitely say this has been a lifetime experience that I will never forget. - Janie

Other Activities

At least one afternoon, we travel into the city to tour the public hospital in town. Father Alex will work with you to arrange the schedule to go to the hospital. Father Alex is now in charge of a parochial school, so that is another option for a tour to observe school activities and school age children. Occasionally, there are also community meetings of the elders in the community so these may also be included as an experience. Sometimes, Maria has to go into the city to handle legal affairs for the clients, so students who are scheduled with her for home visits can go with her to these meetings.

Evening Activities

Every evening after dinner, we have a debriefing session to review the day and allow students to share their experiences with each other. Usually one or two evenings during the trip, we will venture into town for dinner at a local restaurant.