Needs Assessment and Pilot Project Development and Implementation to Benefit Peruvian Orphans and Caregivers

Jamile Tellez Lieberman

Research Report: December 13-23, 2014 in Huancayo, Peru

The student arrived in Lima on the night of the 13th, then traveled to Huancayo via an eight-hour bus ride the following day. Monday, the 15th, was devoted to meeting everyone at the research site, including the children, and taking a tour of the site. The student was also allowed the opportunity to visit the local hospitals; the student spent the majority of the time in the pediatric wards due to the interest in maternal-child health. The actual research, in the form of a qualitative needs assessment, took place on-site at the La Aldea Infantil “El Rosario” home for abandoned children beginning on December 16th. With help from the Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children (FIRMC) coordinator, Danel Trisi, the student scheduled individual interviews with the caregivers and other key stakeholders in accordance with the IRB protocols; a focus group with caregivers was scheduled for the end of the week. The student traveled to La Aldea every day to conduct interviews, in the morning and the afternoon following lunch at the home of the host family. Roughly, the student conducted 4-9 interviews per day. Flexibility was an important requirement for this research since organization and timing less stringent in Peru; often, the student had to rearrange schedules and be proactive in order to collect data without infringing upon the research subjects and their daily lives.

At the end of the week, the student had conducted a total of 14 key informant interviews. Interviews were conducted with 10 caregivers, also known as the “mamas sustitutas” (substitute mothers) and four other individuals who are invested in the well-being of the children, including the on-site nurse and the part-time psychologist. Finally, on Friday, December 19th, the student
conducted a focus group for caregivers based on the information gleaned from the interviews. Nine caregivers attended and participated in the focus group, which was recorded using audio software. Every day was full of activities: when not on-site, the student participated in volunteer activities with the other FIRMC volunteers. The student experienced some clinical practice, including hospital rounds, an anatomy lesson, and suturing practice; the student also helped design and implement a health communication presentation on proper hand washing for schoolchildren.

Overall, the research component of the Peru trip was a valuable learning experience for the student, who had been preparing for months in advance for the data collection. It was very gratifying to implement the research tools the student had developed, as well as begin building relationships with everyone at La Aldea. Visiting Peru as part of the student’s master’s thesis was a defining moment in the student’s academic trajectory since it was the first time the student had been able to engage in research “on the ground” and outside the classroom. Furthermore, this was a rare opportunity to engage in global health and international research.