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## Mid-Term Reflection Paper: El Salvador Medical Internship

The organization I am working with, Operation Mobilization (OM), has a main focus on mobilizing people to build relationships for the Gospel. Days before arriving in El Salvador, one of the biggest preparation points given to me by my internship supervisor was this: be ready to be flexible. That being said, it has been typical for a lot of the things I have been doing and observing to feel spontaneous in nature.

During my first week here, I worked with doctors, nurses, and pharmacists from Germany, Canada, and the U.S. in medical clinics that we would set up at a different school each day in the El Salvadorian city of Citalá. These clinics are used by the local church as a tool for evangelism and building relationships with the community. El Salvador is heavily Catholic by tradition, so in order to change attitudes toward Christ from tradition to relationship, OM's projects get involved in the people's lives.

The team leader asked me to help in the clinic's pharmacy, since they had people in all the other areas but this one (and I said that I knew a *little bit* of Spanish). So, three out of the four days of clinics I worked in the pharmacy area, distributing the prescribed medications (along with an El Salvadorian college student). It was very challenging, at first, to explain to each patient what the different drugs did and how they should be taken, having only taken a year of Spanish in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and done some self-study. However, the student I was working with was able to speak some English and I was able to learn more Spanish from him. Eventually I could explain the medications and respond to basic questions each patient had without assistance. Each day we saw nearly 300 patients, so many times there were a lot of patients waiting to receive medication at once; it would have been a lot for one person, so I was glad that I could use the small ability that I had to help.

Each day of clinic I was also able to shadow the doctors and nurse practitioners as they asked the patients for symptoms, diagnosed the diseases, and prescribed meds from the supplies we had. It was interesting to see the reoccurring symptoms and diagnoses like parasite infection, GI infection, muscle or joint pain, etc. A doctor from Germany expressed that the hardest part about hosting a day clinic is that when a patient very obviously has a serious chronic illness like diabetes, we are not able to address it at all. People in countries like the U.S. and Germany have a means to treat diseases like diabetes but don't have the desire, and a lot of the people in El Salvador have the desire to treat the illness but don't have the means. This demonstrates major healthcare disparities around the world, and the need of medical programs to help educate people about and treat these illnesses.

On the last day of clinic I assisted in taking vitals (weight, blood pressure, pulse) since we had more El Salvadorians helping out in pharmaceutical distribution that day. I observed a wide range of blood pressures and pulses—many of them were much higher than I was used to seeing, so it was a helpful experience.

At the end of each day, I would help gather all the school children to share the Gospel to them with songs and pass out backpacks containing school supplies. The physical gifts we bring will not

solve the communities' major problems or meet the communities' greatest needs, but this ministry is a stepping stone for the church to follow up and continue to build relationships with these people so that they might know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

In the second week, there was a gear shift from medical work to educational work. The doctor I am working with in El Salvador is not only a doctor but also the country leader for OM El Salvador, so I will see and participate in quite the range of activities here. I think this is great, since it uniquely demonstrates that being a medical professional can be rolled right into missions work. For the first half of the week we prepared flyers and went out to schools in Tepetitán, El Salvador to advertise free swimming and guitar lessons that start next week. I went with another OM intern and the OM staff from classroom to classroom presenting the programs to students. I was responsible for presenting how to register for these classes.

During the second half of the week, I went with the OM staff as they hosted a class for El Salvadorians in the city of Cabaña on how to raise goats. The goat project there is funded by some Canadians and will help the community there economically (it is one of the poorest regions in the country). It is yet another way to reach the community and share God's love with them in a tangible way to build relationships, and it was fantastic to be able to see the very enthusiastic, reciprocating side of livestock ministries.

Regarding future responsibilities, the other OM intern and I have been placed in charge of leading a youth worship service this weekend and also planning ways to teach how the Gospel can be shared in creative ways (e.g. a simple story told with colors, a song summarizing the Gospel in four succinct points, a magic show illustration). The OM leader makes sure to remind us to practice and prepare whenever we have a gap in our day's schedule. Next week, I will also be going to an El Salvadorian hospital to tour and observe the medical setting and practices there.

Overall, the schedule here is rather spontaneous, hence the need to be flexible. It is really different than what I initially expected from this internship, coming from an American culture of high structure and detailed scheduling. I prefer the "doing" aspect of things, since I am very task-oriented. However, this internship is not only an immersion in the work that OM is doing in El Salvador but it is also an immersion in the lifestyle. Adapting to a different culture is challenging for me, and it's not often that I have the chance to live with people in another country and speak a different language. My Spanish is beginning to improve because most of my interactions require Spanish. The people here are extremely inviting and friendly, and love person-to-person interaction—when we do things, they are never done alone.

For that reason, this is a very unique experience offering more than just things to do. It is learning to live life with a people and place I am not familiar with and dive in headfirst into ministry with them. Every morning, an OM staff member leads a team devotional, and we study the word together, pray together, eat together, work together and share living quarters together. The staff members are all heavily involved in local community ministries, as well as ministries in other countries (neighboring or abroad). During my short time here, I just get to observe and be swept into the flow of their ongoing work here. This internship is helping me learn a lot about what it means to be a full-fledged minister in another country, and I look forward to what more I will learn in the second half of this trip!