

EDITORIAL

Programa global de entrenamiento en salud: una oportunidad para abrir la mente

Global Health Training Programs: An Opportunity for a New Perspective / Programa global de entrenamiento em saúde: uma oportunidade para abrir a mente

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I belong to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) International Infectious Disease and Global Health Training Program (IID & GHTP). These are the program's objectives (taken from: http://www.iidandghp.com/iidghp_program_objectives.html): 1) to equip trainees with the research, scientific knowledge, and skills to become outstanding researchers in infectious diseases and global health; 2) to create a novel and stimulating multidisciplinary and truly international research training environment that fosters creativity, opportunity, and innovation, and one that demands excellence; 3) to harness the unique opportunity offered by the critical mass of infectious diseases and global health infrastructure, research opportunities and outstanding scientists in the training of the next generation of infectious disease researchers; 4) to make available collaborative international research sites for the trainees' primary research projects, sites for research practice and major course offerings; 5) to offer a shared learning environment, where trainees and mentors from all four of CIHR's research pillars (clinical, social, basic, and epidemiology) and the four international training sites (Canada, Colombia, India, and Kenya) work cooperatively to explore issues of international infectious diseases and global health.

Within this program's activities is the major course – a conference held annually in various countries. This is my favorite activity and is possibly the program's most

enriching activity in every aspect (personal, academic, and research). My first course was in Winnipeg, Canada, where I stayed for three weeks. It was the first time I had been away from Colombia for so long in a non-Spanish speaking country. In the Ecology of Infectious Diseases course, activities such as classes, workshops, oral presentations on assigned topics or on our doctoral/post-doctoral theses, laboratory visits, and other fascinating cultural sites such as the trip planned by Meika Richmond – one of my program classmates – to the Whiteshell Provincial Park for a day of nature and culture. We went to the Bannock Point Petroform site, a very sacred place for the Anishinabe people, which is believed to enrich the mind, heal the body, and nurture the spirit. Additionally, one of the most incredible experiences was meeting Kaveri Gurav, another colleague and friend at the program, who revealed a refreshing, spiritual perspective on life through her personal and academic experiences.

Later, I traveled to India, which was possibly the most fascinating trip I have experienced in my life. This country has a rich history and is culturally very different from the culture I grew up in, characterized by a combination of smells and colors pleasing to the senses. During the course, we faced a quite challenging and rigorous activity, where we were divided into groups of five and were given a topic to write a project on. We needed to do field visits to know and understand the topic

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assigned, as well as contextualize the project. I describe it as rigorous because writing this project in five days meant that the group members had to agree to work as a team and be highly productive in order to successfully complete the assigned tasks. It was all incredible – the hospital visits, community visits, getting to know the large, well-structured community program they have for HIV prevention in sex-workers, and many other things I experienced which would be too extensive to explain in this editorial. It is at times like these when trainees have the opportunity of getting to know each other, learning other ways of working, and learning the day-to-day commitment required to finish the assigned tasks on time. While we received special recognition for having the best project, I believe this was of secondary importance to me. What I enjoyed the most was taking on the challenge of doing it all in such a short time. It was also there where I began working in conjunction with one of my course classmates, Yoav Keynan, a very smart and kind person with whom I have since developed several research projects.

Finally, the Kenya course was a dream come true. Getting to know the people, the safaris, and natural wonders of Africa was all very magical. I also had the opportunity of meeting Kallesh Danappa Jayappa – an incredible, brilliant, noble, and transparent person. During the course, we had a portion on ethics, which came as a pleasant surprise and was very enjoyable. We were later divided into groups and were instructed to evaluate an ongoing clinical trial as well as write a research project on another assigned topic related to the themes being studied at the time; this was all to be handed in within ten days. This course was a perfect fit for me. I am currently doing my doctoral studies in Epidemiology, so having the opportunity to read a clinical trial was an amazing learning experience as it strengthened concepts I had learned during the doctorate as well as aided in providing information in areas such as data management, confidentiality, ethics, the accuracy these studies require, and how to apply many of these concepts to the observational research (in the field) that I am so passionate about and which I have been working with since I began as a researcher.

As you can see, there are a wide range of experiences to enjoy, and numerous interactions that lead to a broader perspective which allows for new ways of understanding

things – just to know we think one way, and come to understand that there are many different paths – some longer and some shorter – which lead to the same point. This experience also helps foment tolerance (respect for differences), strengthen a second language (English, in my case), and set aside certain fears as well as discover others that you are not aware of. In the last place, it gives us a chance to realize that we are not inferior because we come from a developing nation and that we are capable of taking on any challenge.

These types of international programs offer the unique opportunity of establishing collaborative alliances that enrich both parties involved. For example, after a trip I made to Peru to get to know the National Sanitary Strategy for Tuberculosis Prevention and Control, and after the community program I saw in India, I realized the importance of getting the community involved in projects that are intended for the long-term and that require a real transfer of the knowledge generated through research. At that point, we wrote a research project in an international collaboration with Yoav Keynan – a co-researcher on the study. This study was approved at the Colciencias call 569, 2012. We have also had the opportunity of presenting research studies at international academic events on which we have worked in conjunction.

Without a doubt, these types of programs are unique opportunities in life. I cannot close without thanking doctors Carlos Rojas, Lázaro Vélez, and María Teresa Rugeles at Universidad de Antioquia, and Keith Fowke at University of Manitoba for having chosen to include me in this program. I would also like to thank Jude Zeiske, Eva Lindsey, and Natasha Hollett – three people who were in charge of the administrative part of the program and who unknowingly taught important lessons through their diligence, kindness, support, and accompaniment.

When I was first asked to write this editorial, I wondered which topic to address. I decided to write about global training programs, and I could think of many angles from which to present it. I finally decided on sharing my personal experience with the objective of motivating people in our field to put aside their language fears and take advantage of these programs, as well as to invite universities to play a part in these strategies as they strengthen the universities themselves, their staff, and their students. This is an excellent strategy, in light of the current internationalization and the growth institutions are seeking. ■