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Global Health Elective, Santiago, Dominican Republic, March 2018

July K. Jean Cuevas

Children's Mercy Hospital

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July K. Jean Cuevas, MD, FAAP

Developmental-Behavioral Sciences
Children's Mercy Kansas City

Background

- Dominican Republic has a significant number of children with disabilities. Lack of knowledge about developmental and behavioral disorders and no specialized medical providers.
- As a Dominican, I experienced the need for professionals dedicated to children with special needs and autism.
- Stigma around mental health conditions including fear of diagnosis and treatment.
- I wanted to give back to my country, sharing knowledge and experience acquired.

Objective

- To improve the knowledge of health care professionals and families about common developmental conditions, autism and ADHD.
- To provide local staff with tools for early screening and identification of children at risk for delays.

Preparation

- I contacted local colleagues with common interests.
- Being a native helped me adapt to barriers I encountered and work through them.
- Needs: Appropriate developmental assessment to aid Dx
- Early identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders



Experience

- Developmental-Behavioral evaluations of children
- Informal talks for parents and caregivers of children with neurodevelopmental disorders
- Formal teaching lectures for medical providers about neurodevelopmental disorders, early identification and treatment.
- Local radio station live appearances talking about Down Syndrome and the importance of inclusion.

Reflection

- Increased clinical experience
- Learned to work with limited resources.
- Partnering with local hospitals could open doors to start educational programs.
- Despite being a native, I encountered barriers to deliver care for patients in the DR, and I learned how to adapt.
- Understanding the cultural communication system is important to make long-lasting changes.

Future Directions

- I plan to assist and counsel local providers with projects in neurodevelopmental disorders Dx, Tx and education.
- Recurrent visits with other professionals, as part of a mission.
- Partnership with local hospitals and institutions.

