

NICARAGUA, November 2022 - Erik Van Eperen MD, PGY-V

Attending the Global Health rotation in Nicaragua was something that appealed to me from the very first moment I started looking into MCW as a prospective medical student, and it did not disappoint. The benefits are glaring from 10k feet: spending a week in a beautiful country, the rare opportunity to work closely with a classmate, getting to know your attendings on a more personal and intimate level, and using the tools you have been given in a field you are passionate about to help some people and do some good. Conversely, I was also admittedly nervous about the scope of the work. Having experience in global health previously, it was important to me that this opportunity aligned with my ethics of practice, namely avoidance of the white savior complex and religious tourism phenomenon. After the first day on the ground there, it was confirmed: this was a trip with a mission, and one that I could be proud of. It was a fluid situation learning from and working with the attending surgeons there, figuring out when and where and how we could be helpful. The precedent was set that these were their patients and cases and that we were there to assist them in any way that they saw fit, not to just come in, do a couple cases to make ourselves feel better, and then leave. I believe this not only provided excellent patient care but also fostered great operating room dynamics and personal relationships. I learned, I taught, I empathized, I celebrated, and I came away a better physician and a better man. I am very grateful for the medical college, program, and Dr. Schwab in particular for making this possible, and I look forward to future residents participating in this elective.



NICARAGUA, November 2022 - Adam Hadro MD, PGY-V



I eagerly looked forward to the 5th year Nicaragua trip since hearing about the incredible experience my intern year. The stories of operating in conditions far different than in the United States and helping those with disabling conditions inspired me. My anticipation of the trip was further invigorated by the difficult setbacks of COVID-19 resulting in multiple cancelled trips to Nicaragua in previous years. As such, when I received the email in September that the November trip had received final approval for residents; I could not have been more excited.

I have limited experience with international travel and medical missions so when I boarded the plane to Nicaragua, I did not know what to expect. Once we landed, Erik and I were faced with the abrupt realization that our Spanish speaking ability was inadequate as we barely fumbled our way through customs. Fortunately, this was the low of the trip as over the next few days we were made to feel welcome despite our obvious lack of linguistic skills.

Over the first four days of the trip, we were at the main public hospital in Managua, Vélez Paiz Hospital. The residents and attendings at this hospital were welcoming and eager to learn and improve their operative skills. Joint arthroplasty is relatively new in Nicaragua and the physicians were excited to learn new techniques. At this point, Erik and I had an important realization; rather than doing, educating was more important to create a sustainable joint arthroplasty program long after we left.





For the last three days of the trip, we were in Jinotepe which is a rural city to the southwest of Managua. The hospital in Jinotepe has far fewer resources than Vélez Paiz and only a small number of Orthopaedist. There is a great need for orthopaedic care in this city including fracture care, deformity correction, and pediatrics. It is at this point that Erik and I realized that the needs of a country are varied and that in this city there was a greater need for us to provide direct care rather than purely education. This realization culminated in Erik and I working directly with one of the Jinotepe attendings in correcting a distal femur non-union from a previous motorcycle crash. The surgery was difficult with limited resources but rewarding.

Nicaragua was my first opportunity to volunteer in another country using my vocation as an Orthopaedist. As an Orthopaedic resident, I was unsure as to what realizations I would have about serving in another country and how it would influence my future goals to be involved in medical missions. I realized that the orthopaedic surgeons in Nicaragua care deeply for their patients. Each surgeon strongly desired to improve their own skills to better care for patients. I witnessed the need for us to both provide direct care and facilitate the learning of new skills and techniques so that they can continue to improve their own surgical outcomes long after we are gone. As such, my future goals are to continue to learn and share the skills that I have been taught wherever there is a need..