

# NICARAGUA, November 2019 – John deVries MD, PGY-V



Having never gone on a mission trip to a foreign country, medical or otherwise, and not even speaking passable Spanish, I'll admit I had no idea what I was doing. Luckily, we were able to dig up an old email from a few years ago that mentioned the "spotty availability of toilet paper" and "near medical necessity of Ciprofloxacin," for without that sage advice, Jake and I would have been even more wildly unprepared than we already were. He and I decided to set out on a trip to Nicaragua with not even vague goals in mind, but with a desire to help however possible.

We were picked up from the airport by Kevin and Kevin (it's a popular name down there) blasting nothing but Guns N Roses in the car past mule powered taxis to our first clinic day on a Sunday afternoon. Dr. Corea, well known as Pablo here in Milwaukee from his time as a resident visitor and then as an attending, had set us up for cases for the week at his own hospital, the brand new "Velez Paiz." Pablo has quickly risen through the ranks to become the Chairman of Orthopaedics by his early 30s at the new, progressive hospital, as voted by his peers and former mentors. It became obvious to us as to why, as he has been striving to move the state of orthopaedic surgery in Nicaragua to the 21st century since he was a junior resident. With our help, we would be instructing the residents and attendings at this hospital (and at other surrounding hospitals) surgeries that we had become accustomed to such as total hip and knee replacements and shoulder arthroscopy for which they we still not as experienced.

In the days that followed, I could not believe how much I learned. From the 101 ways to use a Cobb elevator, to how to use a simple towel clip to solve problems, to different ways to suture wounds, to bending and fitting plates. They do more with less, and their knowledge of trauma and amputations, and wound management far exceeds many of our experts in the States. However, it does make me appreciate our healthcare system. Availability of OR time, implants, suture, instruments, drapes, gloves, scrubs, is always at the breaking point there. However, the residents and attendings carry on with a contagious optimism, their relationships with patients is deep and personal. It makes me question reasons that I ever get frustrated in the US. The most stimulating part of the week was the residents and the attendings hunger to learn. Their attitude on long cases was still of intense interest, taking videos, pictures, asking questions, offering help when available, filling the OR with observers. It was a humbling experience to say the least. Not to mention the patients, who were just ecstatic to wait 4-5 hours in clinic to actually be seen, and after having their whole posterior shoulder opened up and exposed and repaired, were happy with just Tylenol and occasional tramadol. The look of gratitude on their faces was uplifting.

The last day I was able to travel to the mountain town of Jinotepe, an hour outside of sweaty Managua, in the arid and cooler highlands. The drive was breath taking. There we joined up with the pediatric side of our trip, with Drs. Van Valin and Schwab, and were able to perform complex surgeries on patients well after a trauma with post traumatic arthritis or malunions. This was rewarding in a different sense, as I felt we were more directly helping the patients there instead of educating. These surgeries went well but the conditions here were eye opening, only hints of sterility, unavailability of implants, and single AC units hanging over the OR.

In the end I am thankful that I was able to go and for the opportunities that I had. I truly feel I was able to learn just as much as I was able to teach, despite even teaching Dr. Nelsen-Freund a few tricks. The bonds with attendings there and at home will be for a lifetime. I am even embarrassed by the level of humility and hospitality that Pablo and his residents and fellow attendings afforded us. It truly made me realize why I went into medicine in the first place. Doing more with



## NICARAGUA, November 2019 – Jake Bauwens, MD, PGY-V



It was very difficult to sit still and focus on the OITE when I knew that John DeVries and I would be in Nicaragua one day later. This was a trip that you look forward to as an intern when you see your senior residents leave every year and talk about how great the experience was. Unfortunately, the senior residents were unable to go the year before due to political turmoil. Luckily for us, things have settled down and things are mostly back to normal.

Due to having to take the OITE, John and I arrived the day after the rest of the group and missed the first day of clinic where the majority of our surgeries were scheduled for the week. We landed and were taken immediately to the newly constructed Hospital Occidental De Managua: 'Dr. Fernando Velez Paiz', for Velez Paiz hospital for short. We were immediately taken aback by its pink color, but as we learned from the residents that was the favorite color of the First Lady who got to choose the paint job. We got settled in and were introduced to the orthopaedic team and went on a tour of the hospital. The hospital is no more than 2 years old and is considered the gem of the public hospitals. The group of residents was hand-picked by Dr. Pablo Correa and is considered the premiere residency in Managua.

The next day, Dr. Tony LoGiudice and I arrived back at Velez Paiz to perform our first day of surgery. There were multiple patients lined up to have shoulder arthroscopy for biceps tendonitis, rotator cuff tears, and instability. This hospital was provided funding by the government and acquired 2 state of the art arthroscopy towers for Nicaragua. It was Dr. Correa's vision to develop the shoulder arthroscopy program at this hospital and Dr. LoGiudice and myself were the first to perform shoulder arthroscopy of any kind at this hospital. Residents and attendings were all present and we made a point to pass on our knowledge of arthroscopy. We also finished that day by performing a Latarjet procedure which had an even larger audience and we found ourselves having to get creative while piecing together instruments to safely complete the procedure.

The remainder of the week John and I split time between Velez Paiz and Hospital Lenin Fonseca performing either shoulder arthroscopy or hip and knee arthroplasty with the joint surgeons in each respective hospital. Dr. Nelsen Freund was very gracious with his desire to pass his joint knowledge along to their attendings and residents.

This experience opened my eyes to the practice of medicine and disparities that exist between the United States and Nicaragua. It really allowed me to reflect on our health care system and realize that what we take for granted would be life altering for their country and patients. This trip was an invaluable experience that I will remember throughout my life and career.

