

Honduras provides public health venue

February 28, 2005

By Courtney Weaver

Though still a senior majoring in human biology, Jennifer Miller has already had the opportunity to work hands-on in the public-health field — something that is usually unheard of for an undergraduate.

The Roatan Clinical and Public Health Internship, available for pre-med students in the Bay Area and started by Miller herself, is one of the only public-health opportunities for college students to not only shadow doctors but also to work directly with patients.

Miller learned this first-hand when she became the first student to do the internship this January.

“I had interned in Nepal and done a few other internships [before going to Roatan] but I hadn’t had the experience of taking off and running with something, and really feeling like I was making a difference.”

Miller, a member of Scope, a pre-medical program on campus, initiated and oversees the internship through collaborating with the non-profit organization Global Healing which operates the Roatan Pediatric Clinic, located 30 miles off the mainland coast of Honduras.

The internship lasts for one month and is offered in the summer and during the school year. If completed during the school year, the participants must take the semester off.

The clinic consists of one pediatric clinic and one outpatient clinic, which is limited in its number of staff and resources, creating great need for additional help.

“The public hospital is really understaffed, really under-medicated,” Miller said. “Having someone [like an undergraduate student] who really has the time to find these resources is helpful. As a pre-med student, not only do you feel that you are learning about medicine, but you also get to really make a difference.”

The intern does clinical work in the morning and either public health-related work or independent research in the afternoon.

Natalie Ramos, a Stanford junior who is assistant director of the internship and currently in Roatan as the program’s second intern, described an intern’s typical day.

“Students spend mornings working in the pediatric clinic at the Public Hospital going on rounds, shadowing [and] working directly with patients to arrange medical procedures,” Ramos said. “We also have the



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The Roatan Pediatric Clinic in Honduras is operated by Global Healing and allows students to work directly with patients through internships.

opportunity to do our own public-health outreach programs, work with a local HIV counselor and work with doctors at other clinics around the island.”

Both Miller and Ramos have also had the opportunity to take on individual patients’ cases.

Miller spent a significant amount of time on finding treatment for an 11 year old who would spit on the floor and could not spell his own name. Miller was able to find funding for the boy’s trip to get a psychological evaluation; he was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and gave him a prescription for Ritalin.

Though helping the boy was a long process, Miller predicts this one case will benefit others to come.

“It seems like it’s a lot of work for one patient, but I think we’re going to see a lot of psychological cases coming in,” Miller said. “[Because of this incident], we will have an avenue now to address those types of issues.”

Ramos also stressed the necessity for the intern to take on individual cases such as that of the young boy.

“It’s hard to believe how much the patients have to fend for themselves,” she said. “There’s no sort of universal health care coverage at all and most patients know very little about the system.”

Ramos elaborated on why the internship has been so meaningful.

“I am very thankful that I’ve had the opportunity to get to know the patients so intimately and play such a huge role in their healthcare,” she said. “For me, this is what has made the internship so worthwhile.”

Information sessions on the Roatan Clinical and Public Health Internship will be held tonight and tomorrow night from 7 to 8 p.m. in the Oak West Room at Tresidder Union.

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