



Pharming Abroad: Student Medical Mission Team Brings Pharmacy Care to Nicaragua

By Simone Cousins (NSU College of Pharmacy Student, P-2)

While many students were perfecting their tans, dancing their cares away at a night club, or adjusting to a week without schoolwork during their spring break, three pharmacy students from Nova Southeastern University were on a mission: a medical mission.

Taking their skills abroad, *Simone Cousins (P-2), Iner Taylor (P-2), and Sebastien St. Phard (P-2)* had a unique cultural and learning experience while serving as part of a medical mission team in Leon, Nicaragua through the week of March 12- 18. In cooperation with the organization *International Impact Ministries*, they brought help to underserved Nicaraguans in need of medical and pharmaceutical care.

The team, led by two experienced pharmacists, was comprised of 14 skilled healthcare professionals from around the United States. In addition, two local Nicaraguan doctors were hired to assist with triage procedures and diagnosing. Each day, the medical team packed into a 20-passenger bus and trekked to different cities, often an hour or more away, where they set up their make-shift pharmacy for the day. The working spaces were far from what is considered ordinary. Sheets hitched to clothes line served as walls, the wind blowing through, coating everything—bottles, counting trays, eyes and skin—with thin brown dust. Duffle bags strewn across the dirt floor served as shelves for medication. Despite the unfamiliar conditions, the team ran like a well oiled machine.

The students, who serve as interns at various community pharmacies in Florida, easily adapted to the new environment, amply familiar with the operations of a pharmacy. Utilizing knowledge learned in courses such as Non-Prescription Therapies and Dynamics, students used problem solving and critical thinking skills to prevent errors and counsel patients on proper medication use. At one site there was a large population of children, and the students practiced adjusting doses of antibiotics and cough syrup, which was then verified by the supervising pharmacist.

There was never a dull moment. When the pharmacy wasn't flooded with prescriptions, the team had the opportunity to interact with the locals. The children were

wide-eyed and friendly, and warmly accepted any candies and piggy back rides offered to them. With the help of translators, the team also had opportunities to share the gospel with those they helped throughout the day, bringing messages of hope and God's love.

By the end of the week, approximately 800 patients were evaluated and dispensed medicine in order to treat a variety of ailments, from parasite and skin infections to fever and pain. Some were also dispensed diabetes and hypertension medications. Fully aware that these medications require a continuous supply in order to have beneficial outcomes, the *International Impact Ministries* organization is committed to bringing a team to Leon four times a year. In the future, the organization hopes to visit monthly in order to better serve the health needs of the Nicaraguan people.

The students were able to view an extended role of the pharmacist in addressing global public health issues, as described in the Public Health elective course. They had a wonderful learning experience through this trip, and each one is eager to return to the medical mission field in the near future.

"This was a unique experience for me as a pharmacy student because I didn't realize how crucial a role the pharmacist plays on the mission field. It was fascinating to see the amount of autonomy these pharmacists had—they were very knowledgeable about dosing and medication selection, and I learned a lot from working with them."

– Simone Cousins, Student Pharmacist (P-2)

"I was raised in an impoverished country myself. Observing people living in misery does not stand against having the privilege to do something about it. It was a privilege to be a part of this philanthropic mission in Leon, Nicaragua. I felt useful to be able to have a hands-on experience in the caring of these underserved people. I had a sudden impression that my life has found its purpose as I showed empathy for their situation."

– Sebastien Saint-Phard, Student Pharmacist (P-2)

"Being of Nicaraguan decent, I felt that I was at an advantage because I was able to speak to each patient in their native tongue and be certain that they understood the necessary information. I could tell that they were genuinely thankful for the services we offered simply by the look in their eyes. I plan to continue supporting this organization's goal to expand their reach to even more areas of Nicaragua that are in need of the same help."

– Iner Taylor, Student Pharmacist (P-2)

PHOTOS & CAPTIONS:



L to R: Simone Cousins, Iner Taylor, & Sebastien St. Phard practicing pharmacy at a dump in the city of Chinandega, Nicaragua.



L to R: Sebastien St. Phard and Simone Cousins setting up the pharmacy for the day.



L to R: Sebastien St. Phard and Iner Taylor counseling a patient about how safely dose medication for her child.



Sebastien St. Phard and Simone Cousins playing with the local children.