

Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Indigenous Health Training Course in Colombia

by Laura H. Thompson



In August 2013, sixteen PhD students and postdoctoral fellows from Universities in Manitoba, Kenya, India, and Colombia converged at the Universidad de Antioquia in Medellín, Colombia as part of the International Infectious Disease and Global Health (IID&GH) training program. The IID & GH training program, led by Dr. Keith Fowke, is a collaborative initiative funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research which links trainees from four international research sites and multiple academic disciplines. The purpose of the program is to facilitate learning and foster the development of collaborations focused around innovative approaches to addressing local and global issues related to infectious disease. Over the course of two and a half weeks, trainees received intensive training in epidemiology, academic writing, and indigenous health research.

From August 8 to 9, the IID&GH training program held its 4th Annual Scientific Symposium, hosted by local program lead Dr. Carlos Rojas, Professor in the School of Public Health at the Universidad de Antioquia. The purpose of the symposium was to allow

the trainees to have the opportunity to present their research and to learn about the research of their peers as well as the research of other PhD students affiliated with the Universidad de Antioquia.

Beginning August 10, the trainees attended lectures and tutorials focusing on the fundamentals of epidemiology, data analysis, and manuscript writing. Following in-depth lectures covering basic epidemiological techniques, the trainees had the opportunity to apply this new knowledge by analysing data collected as part of a local tuberculosis study using STATA 11.0 software.

During the second week of the course (August 18-23), the trainees travelled to Riohacha, La Guajira, in the Northeastern part of Colombia. There the trainees attended a two day International Indigenous Health Care Symposium. Health Ministry representatives and experts in indigenous health from Colombia and Venezuela gave presentations about the opportunities and challenges of Indigenous

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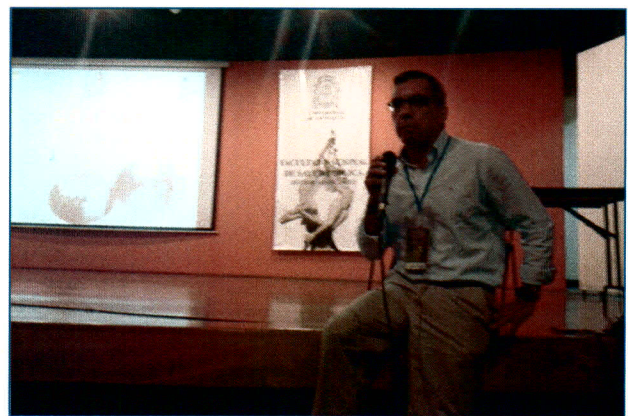
Training Course in Colombia, cont'd

health research in their countries. Dr. Javier Mignone gave a presentation about criteria and standards related to conducting appropriate research collaborations between indigenous organisations and universities. He also spoke of indigenous health in Canada on behalf of Dr. Marcia Anderson DeCoteau, a First Nations physician and assistant professor at University of Manitoba. Dr. Carlos Rojas presented details of his HIV research in indigenous communities in Colombia.

The final part of the course involved site visits to rural Indigenous communities of the Wayuu people of La Guajira in Northeastern Colombia. Groups of four to five trainees were warmly welcomed by these communities with traditional dance performances, food, conversations, and community tours. Trainees also observed the process of obtaining informed consent and the collection of data through interviews conducted as part of a maternal health survey. The data collected from these surveys were analysed by the trainees and contextualised by observations made during the site visit. The following day the trainees presented their findings to each other and agreed to contribute to the preparation of a report to be presented to the communities.

The training provided through this course was excellent. A PhD student from India, Satyanarayana Ramanaik said "The course was wonderful because all the components were interconnected: the epidemiology training, academic writing workshop, and the visit to the indigenous communities."

Throughout the visit, trainees expressed their appreciation for all of the time and thought that was required to plan such an excellent course. University of Manitoba Medical Microbiology PhD student Elnaz Shadabi said "Of course, the experience in Colombia cannot be divorced from the wonderful hospitality and the care that the trainees received from our Colombian colleagues and friends. Their generosity and kindness really enhanced the experience."



All told, this course provided trainees with an experience that they will surely never forget.