



2008 EPS FELLOW

Andrew Chen

HOMETOWN: Chapel Hill, NC

MAJOR/DEGREE:
Doctor of Medicine
Class of 2011

PROJECT TITLE:
Collaborative Sahsa Health Initiative

FACULTY MENTOR:
Douglas Morgan
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COMMUNITY PARTNER:
University of Nicaragua
School of Medicine, Leon

PROJECT LOCATION:
Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (RAAN),
Nicaragua

“Through this project I learned how important patience and flexibility are in a career in medicine, especially when working in international health... impacts may take weeks, months or years to appear.”



UNC ENTREPRENEURIAL PUBLIC SERVICE FELLOWSHIP (EPS)

Collaborative Sahsa Health Initiative

Nicaragua is among the poorest countries in Latin America and struggles to recover from almost three decades of armed conflict and natural disasters. Hurricane Felix, which affected the northern Atlantic Coast, is the latest in this series of setbacks. The area of Nicaragua most affected, the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (RAAN), is historically isolated and underserved. No paved road connects the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Additionally, the two coasts are culturally and linguistically distinct.

Project Goals

1. Collect more than 300 surveys to assess household health care needs with an emphasis on the burden of diarrheal disease.
2. Develop surveillance systems to ensure that the data collected will be adequate for understanding a community.
3. Work in the RAAN clinic with medical students from UNAN-Leon and two UNC residents.

The scarcity of resources in this nation combined with its geographic isolation, have resulted in an especially vulnerable population. Felix, a Category 5 storm, added to this burden. More than 180,000 people in Nicaragua were affected and more 100 people died. The destruction of homes, public buildings and water facilities by Hurricane Felix led to lasting public health issues and exacerbated disease. Our public health work focused on Sahsa, the largest community in the RAAN region.

The Collaborative Sahsa Health Initiative assessed the household health care needs in the Sahsa area of RAAN with an emphasis on the burden of diarrheal disease. I worked with medical students from Carolina and UNAN-Leon along with local health promoters to administer questionnaires and develop a surveillance system. Though the surveys became more and more routine, the conversations with the families were always interesting. Some would offer us what little food they had, others would chat about their lives, and others were just curious about what we were doing in their community.

By making home visits each day, I had the opportunity to converse frequently with members of the community. Although these families lacked sufficient resources, I could sense the strong pride they have in their own culture and their openness to new ideas. With-



out the support of the community itself, development would be impossible. With some direction and the already present determination of the community, there is strong potential that together we can make substantial impacts within the community.



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