



## ***Perspective/Opinion***

# **The Challenges and Beauty of Research in Havana, Cuba**

By Berenice Ramirez Leal, M2 – 2022 Dr. Elaine Kohler Global Summer Research Scholar

*Student doctor Leal spent two weeks in Havana, Cuba in June 2022 as a study team member of the Real-Time Electronic Record and Clinical Guidelines Implementation in a University Hospital in Cuba project.*

My time in Cuba was my first international research experience. Since I embarked on the “T6 Platform” project, I started realizing how important it is to be open to changes and unpredictability. It has been a learning curve since day one, and I am grateful for having the opportunity to work with Dr. de Moya’s team and the Office of Global Health at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW). Everyone has done a great job educating us on global health research. In other words, our mentors have made sure that we approach this experience with humility, respect, tolerance, and appreciation.

During the first three days in Cuba, I familiarized myself with the current trauma team in MCW and learned more about their background and past global health experiences. The Trauma and Acute Care Surgery and Emergency Medicine MCW faculty accompanied us to Cuba and was part of the initial meetings for the project. Our work took place in Havana, Cuba, specifically at the University Hospital Calixto-Garcia, where we met with the Cuban Emergency-Trauma team. These first days were more for bonding and getting to know each other, learning about the country, and identifying common goals.

I introduced myself and talked about my background and future academic plans. They welcomed me and offered their help with anything I could need. From day one, they were very supportive and approachable. The Hospital Calixto-Garcia is diverse and has students from all over the world, including Mexico, my home country. It was a great experience to exchange stories and reconnect with my culture and language. Also, during this time, we explored the city and learned about the Cuban culture, traditions, economy, and current political situation with the US embargo still in place.

Initially, we planned to start discussing the T6 electronic platform implementation shortly after our arrival. However, things sometimes do not go as planned, and we were unable to meet

because of the cyclonic season that extends from June to November. However, the rest of the time I was there, I was able to work extensively on the T6 project.

We held meetings every morning for a week and went over the T6 electronic platform. I learned about the fields in T6 that apply to their trauma/emergency center. Calixto Hospital currently does not have a trauma center and the two specialties—trauma and emergency medicine—are one. During the meetings, I took notes and recorded some of our sessions.


Our time together was engaging and productive. Once I collected the information about what fields they considered relevant, I made videos about the platform for them to review and as a reference point for future meetings.

At the end of the week, I presented what we worked on during our focus groups. I also talked about the next steps in the project. Some of these include following up with T6 adaptation to an operating system compatible with the Calixto-Garcia hospital infrastructure, drafting a new proposal for the electronic platform T6, and staying in contact with the team for adjacent projects that came up during our meetings.

I currently communicate with the team through the WhatsApp application. Even though we do not communicate daily, we know we are there for each other and that the end of summer was not the end of our projects. We will continue working as a team to achieve common long-term goals. I have learned so much from my experience abroad. Teamwork, adaptability, tolerance, empathy, kindness, modesty, resilience, hard work, and thrive were constant during my work with the team in the Calixto hospital.

I still have so much to learn, and this experience has shaped how I want to approach my career as a future global health physician. It has strengthened my desire to pursue this pathway, and I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to be a Kohler scholar and have met amazing healthcare professionals in Havana, Cuba.

*For further reading:*

Review Berenice's summer global health collaborative research [presentation](#) and  [Poster](#) with mentor, Dr. Marc de Moya, Professor and Chief of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery.

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