

Kristabel Ramos
Nursing Experience in Salta, Argentina

The idea of doing an international nursing externship, has always appealed to me since the start of nursing school here at San Diego State University. In my last semester of nursing school, I was excited to see that my wishes came true, when our school partnered with the Spirit of Life Foundation, to send two students to Salta, Argentina. I feel that one of the most rewarding aspects of the program is that you experience the culture and healthcare system of a different country. I had the benefit of being a Latino student already, so this helped me improve my medical Spanish as well as my conversational Spanish. I feel that working with people that have so little, you get back to the basics of nursing from its infancy. I was happy to support patients without the fear of offending anybody. I was able to give a warm touch, hug, and kiss cheek to cheek. It made me feel as if the patients were treated more like family and not just a person in a bed suffering from an illness. I found it intriguing that nurses, here in this country still run hospitals efficiently with little to no resources; just good old motherly care, getting patients out of bed, providing fresh air, and medicine.

My journey in Salta was an enjoyable one. I realized that I came back home with more of a “reverence for life” as quoted from the famous Dr. A. Schweitzer. I have been given the opportunity to improve the quality of life and health of people as a nurse and this trip allowed me to see this beautiful outcome. There are so many people outside of the U.S. that need medical care. I appreciate the healthcare system that the U.S. has in place, even with its faults. I experienced a small village/town that had no running water and the people walked from very far to a small monthly clinic that was run in a small house. This clinic experience impacted my life more than anything on the trip. The people look to you for help and have so much respect for you as a healthcare provider. It gives you a sense of duty, and to me it was honor to serve the public-my personal philosophy is that if you would not do your job for free whole heartedly then it is not for you. This experience makes you want to give all the time you have to the people out there waiting in line because their babies are sick, they need a vaccine or medicine or because they need help and cannot get to a hospital for proper care.

I feel that I will always carry this experience with me. It was truly a joy to serve the people of Salta, Argentina. I feel that I have lost the fear of using manual equipment; I know this may sound funny but good nursing care does not require high tech machines. This experience gave me that little push of confidence that I needed. I have the knowledge and the schooling-I just needed to apply it first hand. I had the experience of helping a woman that needed grief counseling; I felt that one thing nurses can understand is the universal symbol of suffering and grief. The conversation ended with hugs and teary eyes. Another lesson that we must all know, that we are human, and being a nurse does not make you a robot. I enjoyed shedding a tear with that woman and her knowing that I cared made all the difference for her that day. These are the experiences that will live on in my mind forever as a new nurse. It was great getting to make new friends as well. I feel that I have made life long friends in Argentina and with my roommate. Memories that we will share together-it was a great six weeks thank-you for the wonderful journey of nursing abroad!