

Michele Tracy Externship Experience

Hudson River HealthCare Community Health Centers

Olga Yashira Diaz

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University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health

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odiaz@wisc.edu

The personal story of an Ecuadorian woman is one of strength, courage, and perseverance. During one of my first days shadowing in the Pediatrics department, I had a conversation with a middle-aged woman from Ecuador. She was coming into the community health center for a check-up for her newborn baby girl. Feelings of excitement, pure joy and happiness after giving birth to her child concealed her personal struggles with immigration. What began as a conversation centered on pure happiness of giving birth to her first daughter, she proceeded to tell me how much she misses her other four sons who remained back in Ecuador. Perhaps too young to understand the economic and societal circumstances that led to their mother having to immigrate to the U.S. Perhaps also too young to realize, as she stated, that she essentially made the decision in order to provide them with a better life. Over telephone conversations, her sons' excitement to hear about their new baby sister also entailed the dilemma of not knowing when they would even get the opportunity to meet their sister nor when they would reunite with their parents again.

Parents migrating to the United States without their children is not a new story. In fact, it is a common story. Being undocumented individuals diminishes their hope of one day being able to reunite with their children. Peekskill has a strong history of migration. With a population of nearly 24,000, it is one of the fastest growing cities in New York. In the 1980's, South and Central Americans began to settle in the Peekskill area, and today, a walk through major parts of the city will highlight their strong presence. In particular, the majority of the new immigrants are from villages near the city of Cuenca in Ecuador. The presence is felt just walking through town and seeing the vast number of different Ecuadorian restaurants to choose from! And while the richness of culture and diversity is strongly felt in Peekskill, the complex issues that these communities experience are also evident.

This summer I was offered the opportunity to learn about community health and meeting the needs of underserved communities via the community health center model. The Hudson River HealthCare has grown since 1975 to include a network of 22 health centers around different counties in New York. Using the patient-centered medical home model, the community health centers play a vital role in providing access to affordable and quality health care to underserved communities throughout the Hudson Valley and Long Island. By working closely with the various health care providers during my externship I have seen how passionate and truly committed they are to work collaboratively to improve health in their communities.

I would like to thank the UW Department of Family Medicine, Hudson River HealthCare, and the Tracy family for such an invaluable opportunity. This externship has allowed me to truly visualize my future aspirations as a primary care physician and has further fueled my passion to work with underserved communities. Inequities in healthcare and health disparities are essentially what drive my passion for pursuing medicine. The community health center model plays a crucial role in addressing these inequalities in many communities throughout the nation. As our society continues to face barriers to affordable health care, community health centers play a pivotal role in meeting the needs of families such as the woman I met during my Pediatrics rotation.

My Peekskill externship consisted of one week in pediatrics, one week in internal medicine and two weeks in family medicine. The pediatrics and internal medicine health centers were in Peekskill and the family medicine health center was in Spring Valley. The Hudson River HealthCare has 22 different sites! The externship offers a plethora of different sites, specialties, and communities to choose to shadow. The choices also include women's health, infectious diseases, and migrant farmworkers health! These four weeks of shadowing were an amazing learning experience!

Family Medicine

**With Dr. Childebert St. Louis
And Emmanise Louis, FNP**
*Spring Valley and Haverstraw
Communities*

Emmanise Louis is also a wonderful teacher and nurse practitioner. She exemplifies many aspects of being a caring and compassionate provider.

*This experience made me even more
passionate about pursuing family medicine!!*

Dr. St. Louis is a phenomenal teacher and amazing physician. He is often referred to as the "community doctor" since everyone knows and loves him. Originally from Haiti, he speaks 4 different languages! He really connects with his patients, which is an important and invaluable skill essential to providing great care. I was able to learn a great deal about the major burden of chronic illnesses including cardiovascular risks and illnesses and diabetes. His surgical background also helps him provide minor procedures to his patients.

Pediatrics

**With Dr. Vergenia Simpkins,
Ken Sax FNP, and Dr. Mary Woo**
Peekskill Community

Shadowing in the pediatric department was a great experience! As the oldest of five, I actually have developed a natural love for children. Apparently there was a common seasonal outbreak of coxsackievirus, and many of the children presented with the "hand, foot, and mouth sores" along with fever and sore throat. I learned about routine check-ups, benefits of maternal lactation, vaccines, and lots of sore throat care! All the health care providers were very dedicated and truly loved working with children!



Internal Medicine

With Dr. Madeline Velez-Phillips and Nancy Jenks, FNP

Peekskill Community

I had such an amazing learning experience during my internal medicine rotation in Peekskill. Nancy Jenks has a wealth of knowledge and experience in infectious disease and international health. It was wonderful hearing about her experiences abroad as well as her interest and such in-depth knowledge of infectious diseases. I got the opportunity to participate in a patient case discussion on a conference call with a number of health care providers. It was really interesting seeing how the patient case and differential diagnoses were presented and discussed. Shadowing Dr. Velez-Phillips was also an invaluable experience. The majority of her patients are Latino and it was great seeing how well she connected on a personal level with her patients. She emphasized to me the importance of connecting with patients, getting to know them and their families, as well as the complex issues that they each may be facing. Patient care extends far beyond knowing how to treat an illness; communication and a strong relationship that is built on trust and compassion has a great potential for having an impact on individuals.

The Hudson River Valley has so much beauty and a lot to offer!!

My family has recently moved from NYC to Bridgeport, CT. Bridgeport is about 1.5 hours away from the Peekskill area. This summer I was able to stay with my family and commute to the community health centers in Peekskill and Spring Valley. Despite being raised for most of my life in NYC, I was not aware of the gorgeous scenery and beautiful landscapes and mountains in the Hudson River Valley. During my first drive to the area I was speechless! I made sure to take a trip with my family during one of the weekends!

