



Reporting Back: U.S. ELAM Students Return from their Summer Projects



During the summer of 2009, 19 students of the U.S. delegation from the Latin American School of Medicine (Spanish acronym ELAM), in Havana, Cuba, participated in the Brigadas Estudiantil de Salud (BES), launching two student groups; the ¡Salud! Southwest Exchange and the ¡Salud! New Orleans Project.

We had three short-term objectives and one long-term goal; (1) to present *in our own words* our experience of what it is like to study medicine in Cuba and promote the availability of full scholarships to study at ELAM; (2) to volunteer our services as students while learning about some of the more significant health care concerns plaguing the U.S.; and (3) to build personal and professional relationships with community healthcare providers; (long term goal) universal healthcare.

In the ¡Salud! Southwest

Exchange 13 students went to over 12 destinations throughout the southwest in 14 days. We visited community health centers and participated in various community activities to better understand some of the major health-



care concerns.

We were pleased to see so many healthcare professionals overcoming challenges to provide services. We learned about various healthcare models; from public hospitals to community clinics, and now we better understand the benefits of each.

The ¡Salud! New Orleans Project collaborated with Dr.

Post and the Common Ground Health Clinic. They designed a pilot survey and mapped out the area to help answer some of the outstanding questions health providers still toil over. The survey will increase community awareness of the clinic's services and provided everyone with a better understanding of the community's health-care needs. They also created a directory of the neighborhood associations and religious organizations to increase community participation, collaboration and outreach.

These projects are geared towards continuity. We plan to return to communities year after year, introduce new students to the project, and allow older students to secure a sense of constitutional knowledge while seeing to it that our long term goals are being met.

The immediate benefits include increasing community and student awareness about the

health care concerns of the U.S., the availability of services and the opportunity for prospective students to apply to ELAM through IFCO & Pastors for Peace.

We predict that over the next several years, students and graduates will become a more useful community resource while better

understanding the needs of their communities. We also predict that the number of patients in need will increase significantly; clinics and health care providers will be needed to service these communities. As a result we will network health care providers and other community leaders willing to be of service.

This project is about collaboration and networking to provide the best public health resources available to communities in need.

Joanna Mae Souers

For more information, please visit: www.saludswexchange.org/

