

Mentor Visit Assessment #4

Topic: Experience with dealing with surgeons

Date: January 24, 2019

At this point in my ISM 2 year, I have been working on my final product for several weeks now. The medical mission is well on its way to becoming a fruitful project so I am glad that I have been able to be a part of such an amazing organization. However, with that being said, this experience has definitely come with its hardships. I welcome the challenge and the past few weeks have proven to be an amazing learning experience but there are a few things I wish I knew before agreeing to take on such a big project.

For one, I completely overestimated the organizational state of the project beforehand. I assumed, since the trip has been going on for a while and the people involved are incredibly accomplished individuals, that the planning portion of the medical mission would be taken care of and my role would mainly be coordinating the details for this specific trip. In reality, the trip has been put together hastily year after year with little to no structure as to who is in charge of what, who is going, where the money to pay for it is coming from, and a multitude of other essential pieces of information.

Just the task of organizing such a messy event is a very daunting task but adding in the pushback, unavailability, and communication issues I've come across in dealing with physicians, the task seemed nearly impossible at one point. I have covered the communication issue before in a previous assessment of my experience but it is such an important element to successful professional interactions that I'm writing about it again to showcase my complete shock with the lack of it in the medical field. Many of these highly-specialized, highly-trained physicians are geniuses and experts in their field but when it comes to trying to coordinate something out of their comfort zone, like planning a medical mission trip, it feels similar to pushing a wet noodle up a slippery slope.

After another weekly team meeting, I felt highly discouraged with the feedback that I was getting from Aldo and the way he was treating me. I mentioned it to her and one of her team members, Melissa, after the meeting when we were back in Ellie's office. Both Ellie and Melissa were very helpful in teaching me how to deal with the seemingly bipolar personalities that plague the sophisticated medical field and talked to me about their own experiences with trying to work with cardiac surgeons and others like them. This conversation was much-needed and really helped me see the big picture with the Peru trip and all the time I was putting into it. I was told to, instead of looking for the direct praise and gratitude from Aldo like I do from Ellie, I need to look at the overall impact of my work on the trip and how he reacts to it indirectly. Since Aldo is the lead

surgeon and founder of this medical mission, his opinion is very important to me and acts as a “metric” for how well I’m doing. Melissa advised that if he seems to be happy about the trip and isn’t directly criticizing something, I should take that as a good sign to continue doing what I’m doing. Surgeons aren’t the most open people when it comes to showing their emotions and giving praise or credit so learning to look for it in the right places is crucial to maintaining the motivation to continue.

While the intricacies of my relationship with the physicians on the trip has little technical or logistical importance to the actual trip itself, learning how to analyze and facilitate successful professional relationships with good communication is a crucial stepping stone on my path to a successful career. Despite the challenges of this project, I wouldn’t want it any other way because if it wasn’t hard, I wouldn’t be learning and growing from it. I am extremely grateful that Ellie had enough faith in me to put me on this project and I hope to continue to exceed her expectations.