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February 5, 2024

## Forging global understanding

**UCI medical students return from clinical trip to India with new insights into its healthcare system – and new friends**

By Chrissy Park, UCI



UCI medical students worked at clinical sites at Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Medical College. Tori Nguyen

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Nine students from UCI's School of Medicine, along with Dr. Rimal Bera, clinical professor of psychiatry & human behavior, spent Dec. 15, 2023, to Jan. 2 in Rajkot, India. The global health trip – funded by a \$100,000 donation from the Bera family to support annual student travel – placed the cohort in clinical sites at Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Medical College. There, the students, from all four class levels, worked side by side in various departments with PDUMC

interns and began to investigate areas in which to someday collaborate on research projects.

“The medical students returned with a new energy about the responsibilities they have in their work as future physicians. In a time when many people are getting burned out and exhausted within healthcare, this group returned with a new energy that will fuel their passion for what brought them into medicine,” Bera says.

He hopes that the experience will also foster global partnerships: “This trip has opened the door for our students, residents and faculty to develop clinical, educational and research relationships with their counterparts in the Rajkot region.”

Now back in Irvine, four of the medical students reflect on their time abroad and how it will affect them going forward.

### **Tori Nguyen**

Tori Nguyen, a third-year UCI medical student, calls the trip the highlight of both medical school and her life. Her favorite memories are of visiting the psychiatric wards at Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Medical College.

“I saw how the patients were treated like family members,” Nguyen says, recalling the daily ritual of yoga and a patient whose wife had been by his side for months. “It was a very beautiful show of humanity.”

She also appreciated the opportunity to compare healthcare systems in the U.S. and India, noting that despite the latter’s huge population, it’s able to provide care for many individuals.

“This trip was really transformative for me. It reminded me to always keep an open mind and heart – to be humble and learn,” Nguyen says. “The hope is that one day we could invite [PDUMC] students to UCI to spend time at *our* medical school.”

### **Kapila Patel**

Fourth-year medical student Kapila Patel fondly remembers her interactions with the PDUMC interns. Though there are differences between the American and Indian healthcare systems, all the students have a shared purpose of providing high-quality care to patients – “even if we’re on totally different sides of the world,” she says.

As it was her first time in India, Patel also used the trip as an opportunity to explore her roots. Like Nguyen, she’d like to see a reciprocal exchange with the PDUMC interns.

“They were absolutely incredible and welcoming. I’m excited to see how the program expands,” Patel says.

### **Pranathi Rao**

Seeing OB-GYN facilities at government-run hospitals was a trip highlight for Pranathi Rao, a fourth-year medical student. She admired their free care, the rooms for practicing pelvic exercises before labor, and the hospitals’ safety policy of keeping patients for at least 24 hours after childbirth.

“These thoughtful nuances were eye-opening to see,” Rao says.

She was also able to learn a lot from witnessing how India provides healthcare to its population of over a billion people.

“A lot of times, people think that because resources are limited, there’s no way we can achieve a certain goal. But India is able to [care for many people], and it shows that it’s possible,” Rao says. “Not everything was sustainable, but it’s really nice to see different styles.”

### **Neda Izadyar**

Second-year medical student Neda Izadyar calls her newfound understanding of the Indian healthcare system life-changing and powerful.

“They meet the patients halfway,” she says, referring to the community resources available for people living in rural communities or those without transportation.

The psychiatry department at PDUMC especially resonated with Izadyar, who describes the medical care, access to temples and practice of yoga as a “one-stop shop for everything patients need.”

She also reflects on her favorite cultural experiences – eating local food, learning how to dance garba and playing cricket – that she shared with her classmates and the PDUMC interns.

“I built a lot of new friendships that will last me for a really long time,” Izadyar says.

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