



Measuring the Value of Language Training and Electronic Resources to Bridge Barriers between Patients and Physicians in International Settings

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Introduction: International Programs

In an increasingly global world, medical education requires a global approach to enhance student's foreign language skills and cultural sensitivity, and equip them with the knowledge and experience required to address major health challenges both at home and abroad.

The Edward Via Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM) has established three international clinics in Spanish speaking countries, which allows students and faculty the opportunity for first-hand experience practicing healthcare in an international setting. Students can spend one month abroad in any of the three clinic sites (Dominican Republic, El Salvador or Honduras) during their third and fourth years. In addition, VCOM also offers episodic medical outreach trips on acute care and public health to ensure the long term sustainability of in-country clinics.

To prepare students for the one week mission trips and longer month-long rotations, VCOM offers Spanish for the Health Professional training and also provides students with a wealth of online electronic medical texts and other resources through the VCOM library.

Problem: Growing Need for Spanish Speaking Physicians

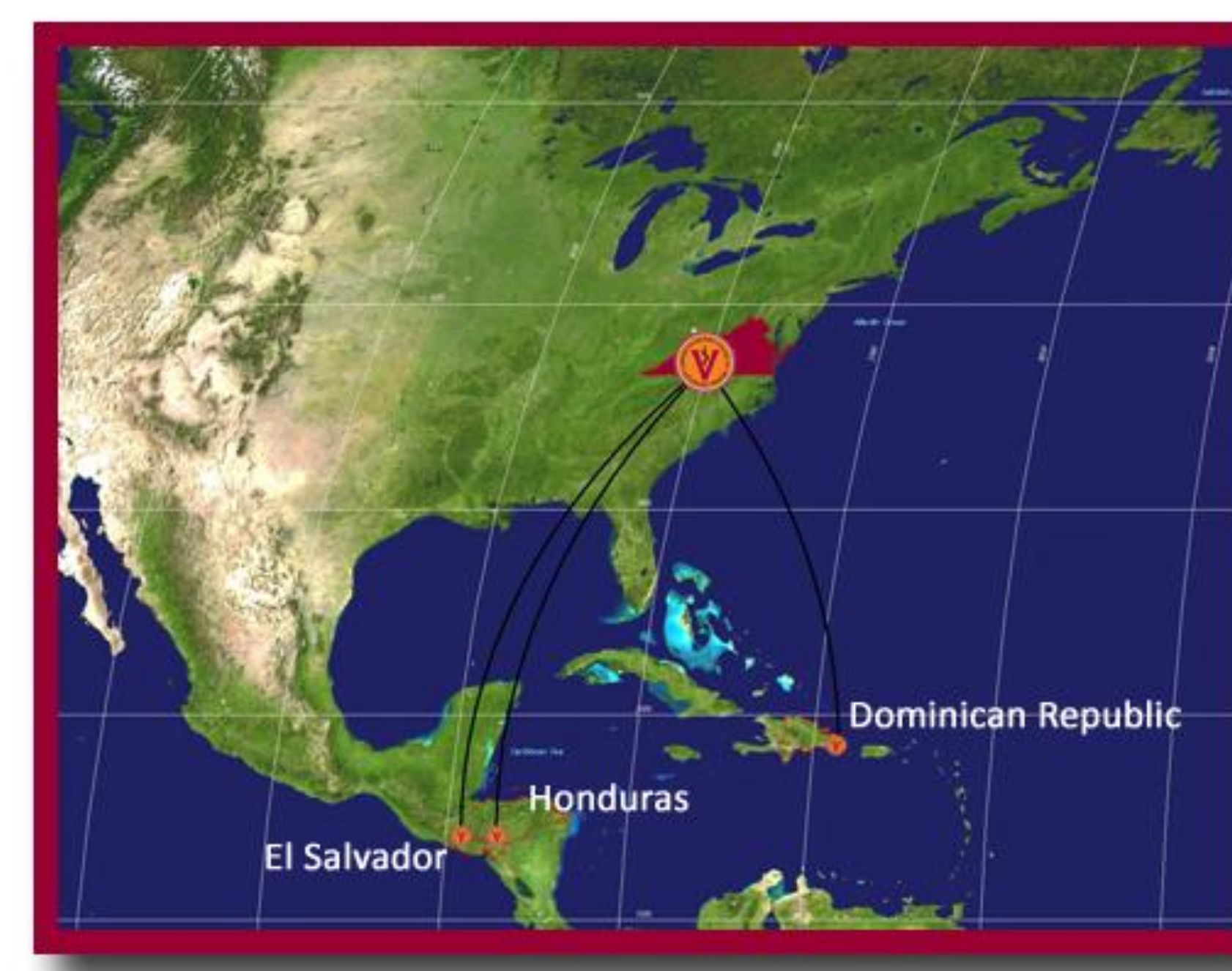
The Spanish population in the U.S. continues to grow each year and recent figures estimate that there will be 52 million Spanish-speaking people in the U.S. by 2020. In addition, as international travel becomes more accessible for Americans and others living abroad, the likelihood that tropical diseases will make their way into U.S. environments increases.

Given the increasing need for Spanish and the growing "global" nature of medicine, knowledge of medical Spanish and tropical diseases is increasingly important for students and faculty to be able to treat the growing sector of the U.S. population.

Rationale

This poster outlines an integrative approach that combines formal language instruction and electronic medical and language resources to assist medical students in communicating and interacting with Spanish-speaking patients in VCOM's three international sites.

Participants include first and second year VCOM medical students who participate in one-week international outreach trips and third and fourth year medical students who complete one month rotations at international sites.



Methods

- A survey was distributed to each of the mission trip (n=96) and international rotation students (n=18)
- Respondents provided feedback on the value of Spanish language training and electronic resources
 - Students described formal language training and rated its usefulness
 - Respondents assessed the importance of Spanish and how limited they felt by the language barrier
 - Students also described the use of electronic library resources and other materials
 - Open ended questions assessed cultural knowledge gained and recommended essential resources

Results

- Response rate among international rotation students was 55% (n=10)
- Response rate among mission trip students was 32% (n=30)

Spanish Language Training

- Of the 39 respondents, only 13 participated in formal language training.
- Most found the formal language training very useful (n=5) or useful (n=3) (62%).
- More than 69% of students felt that it was essential (n=14, 36%) or very important (n=13, 33%) to have formal Spanish language training prior to the international experience.
- Students felt limited in their abilities to take a patient history or understand a chief complaint and depended frequently on translators for communication with patients.

Electronic Resources

- Most of the students did not use electronic resources during their trip (89%).
- Those that did use electronic library resources found translation sites and STATREF to be most beneficial.
- Many students (n=21, 53%) brought books with them to the international site but did not use them in patient interaction.
- The most useful resources were Spanish-English dictionaries and translation guides.

Discussion

- The usefulness of the Spanish training seems to be directly correlated with level or prior experience, indicating the need for varying levels of Spanish training to be offered.
- Most students found Spanish training to be essential or very important, demonstrating the growing need for formal Spanish language training.
- Spanish language training should focus on building clinical vocabulary for patient history and chief complaint and comprehension of patient responses.
- Students valued the ability to connect to online electronic library resources, including STATREF and academic texts and recommended that UptoDate and other infectious disease tools be made available at international sites.
- Each student should be required to carry an English-Spanish dictionary with them on international experiences to assist with patient communication.

Conclusions

VCOM has a goal to prepare medical students to effectively care for the underserved populations, including multi-cultural, Spanish-speaking patients both in the U.S. and abroad.

As evidenced by the results of the survey, Spanish language training is essential for any student participating in an international experience. Training should be offered at varying levels for those with prior Spanish language exposure. In addition to formal training, students should also be equipped with handouts and other quick reference materials for use in patient interactions.

Additionally, students should receive periodic refresher courses on the use of online library resources and the possibility of securing international licenses for UptoDate and other infectious disease resources should be explored.



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