

Our Mission

The Program in Global Mental Health Program at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai enhances access to mental health care for people in East Harlem and around the world. Our program develops, trains, and educates ISMMS students, residents, and faculty to provide mental health services to those who need them most.

Reflections on My Trip to Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic

Dhruv Gupta, MD



Training session with primary care providers in Jarabacoa

In the months leading up to my trip to Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic, I had gathered that the community's mental health resources are extremely limited. However, it was not until I physically reached Jarabacoa and started meeting with patients at our partner site, Instituto Terapéutico y Psicológico para la Familia (INTEP), and visiting local clinics that I realized the gravity of the situation. I felt disheartened hearing stories of individuals traveling over three hours each way to see a psychiatrist; patients not being able to fill prescriptions for months due to medication shortages; and families resorting to keeping patients in locked rooms within their homes due to a lack of inpatient care.

Nonetheless, despite barriers to care, it was inspiring to note the innovative ways in which community members came together to support each other. As an example, early on in my trip, INTEP's Director, Dr. Fernandez, hosted a number of patients at her residence for a domestic-violence group-therapy session that I facilitated. After the session, Dr. Fernandez and the patients hosted a welcome party for me. As someone who is accustomed to boundaries separating what is personal from professional in a clinical setting, this experience was particularly eye-opening as it highlighted the strength of a therapeutic community.

In addition to facilitating group-therapy sessions, I attended to patients in clinic at INTEP and local prisons and visited patients that are "admitted" by family members in their residences. Besides from clinical work, after a series of needs assessments, I ran training sessions for primary care providers in diagnosing and treating major mental health conditions (e.g., mood, anxiety, psychotic, substance-use, and child and adolescent behavioral disorders, and suicidality), as well as a course in cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy (CBT) for psychologists. Moreover, through collaboration with local universities, I hosted a discussion on careers in psychology and psychiatry with students.

Reflecting back, my month in Jarabacoa flew by. With each passing day, I found myself increasingly integrated with the community and immersed in the work that I was doing. I will forever cherish the relationships that I forged during my time in Jarabacoa. Although I may not cross paths with everyone that I encountered during the trip in the near future, I know that I will always be connected with them through our shared passion to improve access to and further the scope of mental healthcare. I am incredibly grateful for my global mental health experience and to everyone that made it possible.

Program Partnerships:

Instituto Terapéutico y Psicológico para la Familia, Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic

Grenada Ministry of Health

AMPATH, Kenya

HaitiChildren, Williamson, Haiti

The Minds Foundation, in collaboration with GMERS Medical College and Sumandeep Vidyapeeth University, Gujarat, India

The Aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011

The Carter Center, Ministry of Health, and the Liberian Association of Mental Health Providers (LAHMP)

Monrovia, Liberia

Belize Ministry of Health

East Harlem Health Outreach Project

Interfaith Welcome Coalition, San Antonio, Texas

American Friends Service Committee, Newark, NJ

**Check out our
Program in Global Mental Health Website!**

<https://icahn.mssm.edu/education/medical/md-program/global-mental-health>

Situated south of the Yucatán Peninsula, Belize is a land of mountains, swamps, and tropical jungle. A Central American country with a long Caribbean coast, Belize is home to a diverse population of approximately 405,272. Belize's cultural and linguistic diversity ranges from Spanish to creole/Afro-European population to German speaking Mennonites, from native Mayan people to Garifuna (Carib-Indian). While travel restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic did not allow me to experience the diversity and beauty in person, in March 2022 I experienced the diversity, beauty and, most importantly, a window into the mental health field in Belize through my one month long virtual elective.

In 2006, the Belize Mental Health Program commenced a collaboration with Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. As a part of the collaboration I provided training to the psychiatric and non-psychiatric providers on different topics of psychiatry. According to WHO, 13% of the population in Belize have some forms of mental illness; despite that approximately only 2% of the total health budget is allotted to mental health. For a population of 405,272 of 7 districts, there are only 4 psychiatrists and one psychologist. This immense shortage of providers is covered by psychiatric nurse practitioners who are trained not only in pharmacological management but also in individual therapy.

Since the early 2000s, there has been a paradigm shift in Belize in the practice of mental health. Considering the stigma around mental health, the ministry of health of Belize aimed to integrate mental health care with primary health care services. As a part of this model they closed the only psychiatric Hospital in 2008, and 22 patients were discharged into family care. They established new community services: an acute inpatient psychiatric unit within the Western Regional hospital, two acute inpatient beds within the national referral hospital, and a day Hospital (Port Loyola Mental Health Acute Day Hospital). Along with integrated services at the community level, Belize also has mobile clinics comprised of a team of nurses to provide care in the remote and rural areas of the country.

The current mental health workforce in Belize comprises 16 Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners, 4 Psychiatrists, 1 Counselor, 1 Social Worker, 1 Occupational therapist. Along with them, I provided training and workshops to 15 primary care providers, who very often provide care to patients with psychiatric illnesses, as a part of the integrated care model. The topics were decided by the host country providers based on their preferences and need of shared knowledge. A major challenge that has arisen since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic is the uptick of mental health diagnoses among the child and adolescent population. Like with children all over the world the Covid pandemic and subsequent isolation have significantly impacted children and adolescents' mental health in Belize. This challenge appeared even more so evident due to lack of adequate resources, healthcare infrastructure and lack of any child and adolescent psychiatrist in Belize. While sharing part of my limited knowledge and experience, I carried home the unmatched enthusiasm, zeal and warmth of the providers of mental health program in Belize.



Honey Win, MD, Mount Sinai Geriatric Psychiatry Fellow

Program Faculty & Residents

Faculty

- Cindy Aaronson, PhD
- Amy Aloysi, MD, MPH
- Ben Angarita, MD
- Rachel Fischer, MD
- Ludwing Florez-Salamanca, MD
- Vicki Gluhoski, PhD
- Gary Katzman, MD
- Jeffrey Kleinberg, PhD, MPH
- Daniella Loh, MD
- Glenn Martin, MD
- Anna Rosen, MD
- Ankur Uphadyay, MD
- Elizabeth Visceglia, MD
- Hiwot Woldu, MD
- Robert Yanagisawa, MD

PGY-3

- Carlos Hallo, MD
- Connor Hoch, MD
- Erva Khan, MD
- Greg Morgan, MD
- Storm Portner, MD
- Ben Shuham, MD
- Brian Starkman, MD

PGY-4

- Kousanee Chheda, MD
- Hillary Duenas, MD
- Melissa Kelley, MD
- Luca Pauselli, MD
- Harshit Sharma, MD

A Special Note:

Welcome to Peradeba Raventhirarajah as our new Newsletter Editor and Program Coordinator, and many thanks and best wishes to Kira Schmidt as she moves on to another institution!