



# Global Healthcare: Social Services and Mental Health in Córdoba, Argentina



Felicia R. Knox  
University of Michigan's School of Social Work

## Córdoba, Argentina

Córdoba is a city that sits in the center of Argentina. It rests 1,440 feet above sea level surrounded by valleys formed by the Sierras de Córdoba Mountains. The country is filled with unique Italian and Spanish influences that are evident in their customs, culture, and cuisine.

## Project Information

Child Family Health International provides full immersion into urban/rural hospitals and clinics around the globe. My Global Special Studies in Córdoba, Argentina centered on learning about the differences in their healthcare system and the United States'. It also centered on how Argentine hospitals provide mental health and social services.

## Local Placements

In my four week special studies, I was placed at Hospital Córdoba, a public hospital that serves people from ages 16 and up, and Hospital Pediátrico, a public hospital that serves children and adolescents from ages 0 to 15. I observed in the social services and mental health units and participated in intake interviews and psycho-assessments.

## The Whole Experience

- ❖ The **people** made my experience. I formed connections with my host family, hospital staff, and others that I met throughout my time there.
- ❖ **Exploring** beautiful, historical cities and mountains filled my weekends.
- ❖ The **hospitals** provided a glimpse into the staff's dedication to serving all. Hospital Social Workers provide referrals to disability, medication, and other services and health education. Mental Health Workers provide bedside psycho-assessment to burn unit patients, individual therapy, crisis intervention, and group counseling.

## Outcomes & Skills

My **academic product**:

- ❖ A research essay about Argentina's culture, healthcare, and mental health services

My **accomplishments**:

- ❖ Engaged with the hospital directors of Mental Health, the director of Social Services, other workers, and masters and doctoral students
- ❖ Learned about their free healthcare system and the different challenges and successes it creates

The **skills** used and developed:

- ❖ Adapt to a new environment and culture in intense immersion
- ❖ Engage in multicultural and monolingual (Spanish) social work practice
- ❖ Learn different strategies to work with children from ages 5 to 12

## Connections

The **classroom**:

- ❖ SW 612: Mental Health and Mental Disorders of Children and Youth
  - I learned essential skills to diagnose and treat mental disorders in childhood. In Córdoba I was able to directly observe and practice treatment techniques.
- ❖ SW 636: Mental Health Policies and Service
  - This course prepared me to better understand mental health policies. I was able to apply what I learned to understand the Argentine system.

My **career**:

- ❖ My time in Córdoba, Argentina further confirmed that I want to work with children. Participating in their intake assessments showed me how much I enjoy using creativity and play to connect with them.

## Lessons & Advice

The **lesson**:

- ❖ It is easy to look at the flaws of a system. However, health professionals work with the resources that they have to best serve their communities.

The **advice**:

- ❖ Be open to new experiences in order to get out of the comfort zone.
- ❖ Engage with clients and the placement's staff.
- ❖ Explore the city/country, talk with locals, ask questions, and listen.
- ❖ Share about life in the United States.

This is the best way to **make connections** and **learn**.



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to (1) my family for supporting me in everything that I do, (2) Jorge Delva for being my independent study advisor and a support, (3) the Board of Governors for helping fund my way, and (4) the Global Special Studies office for awarding me the grant and allowing me to participate in this experience!