

Overview of my LiA Experience

Lucas Maughan

This summer I spent a number of weeks in Puerto Rico as my Leadership in Action (LiA) experience. Puerto Rico (PR) is a small island in the Caribbean and is not a country but rather a United States territory despite what you might think. It is home to approx. 3.2 million people with a high degree of ethnic diversity due to its colonial past with Spain and United States among others. Spanish is the predominant language spoken as a result of its past as a Spanish colony.



Figure 1: Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/puerto-rico>

Hurricane Maria landed on the island in 2017, leaving the devastated island in a major humanitarian crisis. The funeral homes were overwhelmed with the number of deaths, hospitals were overrun and the power grid destroyed. PR was in a perilous state and so too was healthcare in the region. The effects of the hurricane are still felt, and I became interested in how access to care has recovered or improved since the hurricane.

While in San Juan I volunteered in a HIV clinic (PR CONCRA). I assisted with the delivery of the new monkeypox vaccine. As part of this role, I spent a lot of time working with a nurse the director. This was all carried out through Spanish and we rarely spoke in English and I preferred it that way. At the beginning, I found the Spanish dialect quite different to the 'Catalan' Spanish I was used to. They spoke Puerto Rican Spanish which is a type of Caribbean Spanish. This presented a challenge to communication initially. I prioritised understanding the different variation of Spanish as accurate communication is of imperative importance in a healthcare setting.

Whilst there learnt lots about monkeypox symptoms, detection, vaccination and treatment and it was really interesting getting to work with vaccines approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and seeing how the information provided differed Irish markets.





I also partook in the 'Ronda Nocturna' or night rounds for Iniciativa Comunitaria, a local community initiative non-profit organisation. I shadowed the doctor in charge of the organisation, learning the art of 'Street Medicine' and worked with others to provide services to those suffering from substance use disorder. Many of these individuals were homeless residing in hard to reach places such as under bridges or seeking shelter outside shopping centres. Unfortunately, societal stigma means they are not seen as individuals and rather a problem. I gained great compassion for these people through working with Iniciativa Comunitaria.

I worked closely with my supervisor Professor Kyle Melin of the University of Puerto Rico, Escuela de Farmacia (School of Pharmacy) to coordinate these volunteering experiences. After my interest in working on the night shift I became involved in writing a paper on access to treatment in Puerto Rico for those with substance use disorder. I have since been working on analysis of results and the development of this paper so that it is of publishable standard.



My experience in Puerto Rico has given me opportunities to develop teamwork, communication, professional skills, vaccination knowledge, academic knowledge, cultural awareness and many other skills not listed. I believe it has made me both culturally and societally aware of the impact we can have on a specific community as a leader in a field of our interest. I am extremely grateful to have been given the opportunity to be supported by the Laidlaw Foundation in undertaking my LiA.

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Laidlaw Scholar and 4th Year Pharmacy Student

Trinity College Dublin.



Some Pictures of Puerto Rico from my LiA

