Sanitation in Guatemala

Brittany Zarda
Patanatic, Guatemala
Background Information

- Guatemala is a developing country, with around 75% of the population living below poverty level.
- Sanitation is a major issue in Guatemala.
- In Patanatic, there was not a formal service for trash or sewage.
- There was trash on the sides of the streets, in Lake Atitlan, and in people’s homes.
- The people of the homes in Patanatic had their own sewage systems set up that are insufficient as well as the few sewage system plants around the area of Lake Atitlan.
- Lake Atitlan was named the “Threatened Lake of the Year” in 2009 by the Global Nature Fund (Global Nature Fund, 2016).
The lack of funding and the high poverty rate is a contributing factor to the pollution and sanitation issues in the area of Solola.

Wastewater and litter contribute to the sanitation issues.

The litter on the sides of the roads gets washed into the lake as well as communal trash areas are not leak proof, thus trash leaks into the lake.

The sanitation issue of the lake, sewage, and trash systems affect the health of the people of the area because an extremely low percent of the lake water is treated, and the treatment that does happen does not remove pathogens such as e. Coli that affect health (Global Nature Fund, 2016).
Clinical Sites

- Most of time was spent in Patanatic, Guatemala, specifically in the clinic.
- In the clinic, we would see mostly children, some infants and their mothers, and some middle-aged adults.
  - The Patanatic clinic is run by 2 local nurses
  - One of the nurses brothers will be a physician at the clinic once he finishes medical school
- We also went out into the community of San Luis and Patanatic and saw the older adults as well as visited families water filters and smokeless stoves. We also visited the children at schools around Patanatic.
- For two days we took a water taxi to different small towns around Lake Atitlan and visited schools to assess the children and visited the homes of community members to assess their water filters and smokeless stoves.
Specific Learning Objectives

Purpose: The purpose of our trip was to learn about population health, perform community assessments, assist in bringing resources to the community, and progress our skills in providing culturally sensitive care.

Health Indicator: How sanitation Issues in Patanatic, Guatemala affects the community health
Information on Health Indicator

- Many of the people living in the area do not have formal sewage or trash systems.
- There is no education being done on the importance of sanitation and how to treat trash and sewage.
- There is a lack of funds to start a formal sewage and trash system.
Interventions for Sanitation

Individual Level
- Keep trash confined to a certain area of the home
- Attend community meetings regarding sanitation and a formal trash system
- Advocate for a formal sanitation system in the community

Community Level
- Hold community meetings regarding sanitation in Patanatic
- Education on the importance and impact of proper sanitation for the health of the community
- Communal advocacy for a formal sanitation system

Systems Level
- Funding for a formal sanitation system
- Responsible financial system with no corruption so funding goes where it is most needed
- Nationwide education on the impact of poor sanitation on the health of the people
Conclusion

Woodland Charities and volunteers have started to make an impact on the health and sanitation of the community, however there is much work to be done. Most of the focus right now is going towards education on clean water. There needs to be more education and push for a formal sanitation system in the community. There was a plan to implement a formal trash system, however the corruption of the government ended up causing the money to be lost to fund for the project. The health of the people of the community of Patanatic are suffering due to the corruption, and it will take advocacy, time, education, and volunteers to help change this process.
Most Profound Clinical Experience

My most profound clinical experience was to see how prevalent breastfeeding was in the Guatemalan culture and then to see the drastic change in the nutrition of the baby’s that were being breastfed to the children that no longer breastfed. I was happy to see mother’s breastfeeding, and I noticed how healthy the infants that were breastfeeding were. However, once the children reached ages where they were not breastfeeding anymore, they started to show trends of being underweight and underheight. We were able to assess childrens height and weight and then give them multivitamins if they were malnourished in hopes of improving their condition.
My most profound cultural experience was seeing how the children and people there were so happy with so little compared to what we have. Children would come to the clinic asking for cardboard boxes to sleep on, but they were still joyful and smiling. They were genuinely happy with their lives. The adults in the community were grateful and happy to say hi and talk with us, even offering us chairs to have a seat in their homes. The people of the community were welcoming, kind, and at peace with their lives. It was truly an eye-opening and humbling experience, and I now make a conscious effort to realize how fortunate I am, and to be thankful for the opportunities I have.
My Favorite Memories

- Taking a water taxi to different communities around Lake Atitlan
- Assessing and getting to talk with the children in the different schools
- Learning about the area of Patanatic, including native fruits and vegetables
- Learning how the people of Patanatic get around, and what their usual daily routine is like
- Playing basketball against the school teachers of San Luis Elementary school
References
