

# MY EXPERIENCE AS A WORLD VETS VOLUNTEER

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This past March I had my very first trip out of the country; I volunteered with World Vets in Granada, Nicaragua. I had wanted to have this experience since I was in veterinary technology school and finally had the opportunity. After arranging my passport and having received more vaccines than any patient of mine, I embarked on an adventure that would turn out to mean more to my career and me than I could have ever imagined.

Before getting to work in Granada, home of the International Veterinary Medicine program, our group of volunteers (veterinarians, technicians, vet students) was taken for a tour around the city by horse drawn carriages (which is still a common mode of transportation there). We were able to familiarize ourselves with the city, the street dogs, and the locals, as we would be staying for seven days.

After a leisure introduction to the city, it was time to get to work. One goal was to provide free veterinary services to the dogs and cats of the colonial city. Our group visited the World Vets Veterinary Hospital and had an orientation meeting for the coming week. The volunteers were divided into two teams: induction and surgery. The teams discussed tasks that lie ahead for the clinic and the upcoming week. It was organized into who was going to do what, where, and with whom.

The induction team consisted of 2 RVTs (including myself), a technician student, and three pre-vet students, and was charged with pre-medicating the animals, placing intravenous catheters, inducing anesthesia and intubating before prepping for surgery. The veterinary students present hailed from Tuskegee University, and they were performing the first surgeries of their vet school career, alongside volunteer veterinarians from World Vets. Therefore, a second goal of the program was to provide a training opportunity for students, and to

gain on-hands experience, with guidance from credentialed veterinary technicians and licensed veterinarians.

On surgical procedure days, the team spayed/ neutered an average of thirty dogs and cats (each day). The citizens of Granada know when World Vets is operating their surgery days and will bring their pet for veterinary care (it may be the only time the pet may receive veterinary care during its lifetime). These pets are very loved as companions, but are often ill with tick borne disease (babesiosis and ehrlichiosis), and burdened with intestinal parasites (the most common being hookworms). Despite their conditions, the pets are very hardy animals and complete their procedures with few complications.

There were a few minor differences in induction and prep procedures, verses that in the average United States practice. For example, a corn oil is used lubricate patient eyes in Grenada; it is perfectly safe and much easy to obtain, as veterinary supplies are limited.

The team had three surgical days with no air conditioning (in the tropical heat!), and worked from eight in the morning until the last patient was recovered. The very last day, the electricity failed (a common occurrence in the town). Without fans and electric clippers, the induction team slowed down just a bit. The team got creative and purchased Gillette razors from a nearby pharmacia and kept moving with surgical shave and prep.

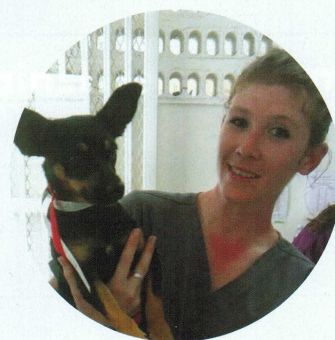
One of the most important days of the trip was the community outreach day. The team left the city of Granada for dirt roads and the barrio called Posintepe. As the van we pulled into the barrio, people from the community were walking with their animals to the makeshift clinic area. Many locals will take the day off from their work to make sure their pets receive care from World Vets.

The field clinic consisted of a table and a Tupperware storage tote filled with supplies. The line of patients was long, and included cattle, horses, dogs, cats, pigs and rabbits. Large animals and small animals were set up in spate areas. The students (veterinary and pre-vet) ran a majority of the cases; they would gather history (to the extent the language barrier would permit), assess the patient with a physical exam, administer rabies vaccine (if the pet had never had one), gave an oral dewormer and applied a topical flea medication. The large animals were all examined and treated with an oral deworming medication. Horses received dental care, as needed as well as Vitamin B injections. The veterinarians and vet students were able to perform equine and porcine castrations in the field as well as treat any wounds as needed.

One very important phrase the team learned: "Esta bravo"? which asks if the dog or cat is aggressive. One veterinarian and one pre-veterinary student were more proficient (than the remainder of the team) with the Spanish speaking owners; however, anytime a client tried to provide more information than what

could be understood, a translator would provide assistance in order to obtain a patient history.

Most of the small animals seen were covered in fleas and ticks and pale in color. A couple of cases were more severe; a World Vets volunteer took these patients back to Granada for more complete care at the hospital in town. One of these cases was a little black dog that was almost lifeless as the owner approached outreach clinic. The owner was very distraught as her dog was nearly unresponsive and she was unsure how to care for it. She spoke through the translator and said that the dog has been lifeless for a couple days. This pet was transported to the Granada hospital where it was determined the PCV to be 5%! A transfusion was performed and by the next morning the dog was standing, even snapping at the technicians!



**During the community outreach day, the veterinary volunteer team was able to treat approximately 130 dogs, cats and rabbits and 30-40 horses, cattle and pigs.**

The impact the veterinary field clinic had on the community was barely felt that day, but no doubt the animals and owners are better off because of it.

Over the course of the week in Nicaragua, I worked harder than I have ever worked in a practice in America. I had expectations to perform under pressure, do things once, and with minimal waste. I learned different techniques from numerous other volunteers, like intubating without a laryngoscope, performing intradermal injections, and intubating an animal in lateral recumbency. I also learned what I cherish most about our profession, our abilities to change lives, to improve the lives of animals, and the people that care for them. I would challenge any veterinary technician to jump at the opportunity to volunteer for an event like this. For more information on opportunities with World Vets, please visit: [www.worldvets.org](http://www.worldvets.org)

