

Margaret Wheeler Meeting April 17, 2015

Introduction:

General Schema of Health System in Nicaragua

Ministry of National Health: MINSA

- MINSA oversees public health sector and delivery of public care
- Includes about 1,059 health facilities; these include 32 hospitals, 28 health centers with beds, 144 health centers without beds, and 855 health posts
- 17 departmental SILAIS—Department level Health and Human Services Agencies
- There is a SILAIS director and a senior management team for each SILAIS. The team includes heads of health services, human resources, and labor union representatives.
- At the municipal level, each municipality is made up of a nursing chief, a manager, an epidemiologist, and a doctor responsible for health care services
- MINSA also funds and oversees the medical school

Below is a flow chart of MINSA organization that is taken from *The Nicaraguan Health System*, a document published by PATH, an international nonprofit organization that “creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health.” (attached)

MINSA flow chart

Administrative levels

Central level



SILAIS level



Municipal level

Health services

National reference hospital



Departmental hospitals



Health centers



Health posts



Community based clinic (home-based)



The Nicaraguan health system also has a very strong community-based health network, consisting of 4,400 home-based community clinics and 33 maternity homes, called the Casa Maternas, or Casas de las Madres. Most pregnant women stay at the Casa Maternas for a week or so before and after before they return home, particularly if they are from a rural area. Most deliveries are in the hospital

MINSAs-trained independent volunteers and community health workers linked to the Ministry of Health work with this health network by providing health promotion activities. Sandinistas began training these independent volunteers known as “brigadistas” in the 1980s, and they are responsible for things like home visits, community-based education and health outreach, conducting community censuses, weighing children, and administering contraceptives to local women. Midwives keep a local census of pregnant women, provide health care services, and promote family planning methods.

Meetings:

Dr. Ramirez head of the Sutiaba Health Center that oversees

1. The Sutiaba Health Center
2. The Sutiaba Casa Materna
3. Health Posts and Community Clinics in Sutiaba—including Goyena Clinic

Sutiaba Clinic equipped with pharmacy, laboratory. Do directly observed tuberculosis treatments; have pediatrician, dentist; ob/GYN, do PAPs and colposcopy.

1. Track health statistics for the area—respiratory illness, diarrheal illness; malarial illnesses; TB; chronic health conditions

Dr. Aleman, Dean of the UNAN Medical School:

Medical school is an arm of MINSAs.

Head of medical school is Dr. Aleman, a pediatrician. He is in charge of educating doctors.

Nicaraguan Medical Education: Students begin immediately after high-school. Medical school is six years, with the last year being a clinical one. Then students do 2 years of social service working in the community health clinics and health posts, after which they can practice as generalists in similar situations or can apply to very limited positions for specialist training, that is more advanced residencies. No primary care residency currently exists, but Dr. Aleman is in the process of attempting to establish a Family Practice residency.

He is interested in the possibility of having students at Goyenas clinic and in collaborations to 1) enhance education, research potential and collaboration of his students, faculty and practicing doctors in Nicaragua and support the Family and Community Medicine Residency if it is established.

He is interested in an MOU with VL that involves other UNAN faculties like agriculture, medicine, and other sciences to involve faculty to assist with projects and consultation and bring students out in the field to learn.

Lisa Gussak MD is a Professor of Family and Community Medicine(FCM) from University of Massachusetts who has a Fulbright Fellowship to help UNAN write the proposal for a Family and Community Medicine Residency. She has also worked with the UMass FCM that sends residents to Leon for global health experience.

Telephone call with **Heather Zornetzer**

Heather Zornetzer, MS, MPH

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Heather is the Director of Sustainable Science Institute, an NGO that was started by Eva Harris, a PhD in the School of Public Health and a winner of a MacArthur grant for this work. SSI works on supporting upstream public health research in low resource settings. They have several on-going projects with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health (MINSa) and have worked extensively with the Pan American Health Organization.

Currently SSI has several projects in Nicaragua. They have been working with MINSa to track Dengue Fever in Nicaragua for about 15 years. They also have a program called Vigilantes Comunitaria that trains community health workers, the *Brigadistas*, connected with MINSa, providing them with Android phones with simple decision support software that allows collection of public health data that can be transmitted to SSI. SSI then cleans the data and delivers it to MINSa. One project in particular is helping to track high-risk pregnancies, a project of particular interest to Dr Sonia Castro Gonzales, an OB-GYN who is the director of MINSa

Heather has been working in Nicaragua for years and has a wonderful understanding of the public health resources, the working of MINSA and the political realities of public health work in Nicaragua.

If Viviendas or the clinics /community health workers would find using the SSI platform for the collection of data, they would be glad to make it available.

Other contacts:

NGO operating in Nicaragua started by two UCSF medical students that trains community health workers and sends UCSF medical students to Nicaragua.

<http://teachforhealth.org/team/>

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Dra Aragon at UNAN in Department of Occupational Health has been very involved in CKD studies.

Peter Strickham MD—retired MD has worked on Brookline sister city

Daniel Brooks—PhD BU Department of Public Health—involved in large CDC funded CKD epidemiological studies.

Opportunities for Viviendas Leon

Best collaboration opportunities might be supporting the Goyenas clinic and the Brigadistas, through their public health outreach and education efforts. There might also be opportunities to have targeted interventions supported by VL—if Goyenas family is particularly hard hit by respiratory illness, Goyenas clinic might refer to you for assistance with stoves; or water chlorination and boiling education for community etc.