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After Peru, it's can-do



Northeastern student Shane Smith, far right, completed a co-op at a public health clinic in Peru. Courtesy photo.

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Shadowing doctors, dressing wounds and administering antibiotics on co-op at a public health clinic in Cusco, Peru, inspired Northeastern University student Shane Smith to consider a new challenge: medical school.

"I would recommend international co-op to any student who's not sure what field he wants to go into," says Smith, a fourth-year **biochemistry** major. "Immersing myself in a new culture and language made me realize that I can do anything."

Smith worked closely with doctors and low-income patients at Belempampa Health Center, in Cusco. He dressed the wounds of a 19-year-old patient who contracted a flesh-eating disease from a sand fly; gave informational presentations on diseases, such as tuberculosis; and organized maternity rooms for obstetricians. One doctor even taught him how to stitch a wound.

The experiential learning opportunity sparked his desire to give back by helping patients get well.

As Smith puts it, "I'm one of those people who worry about how others are being treated. Being able to help other people at the clinic was just another step in growing up."

He wants to make volunteering in Central America a routine part of his life, and he's not wasting any time.

Smith plans to do part of his next co-op in Costa Rica and Guatemala, where he figures he'll have a chance to work in a larger, more technologically advanced, hospital—an experience more akin to his first co-op at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, where Smith analyzed blood samples from heart attack survivors.

He says that working and living in Peru prepared him for whatever a doctor or patient or local might ask of him.

"I learned that I can adapt really well to my surroundings," says Smith, who notes that his Spanish-speaking skills improved greatly during his co-op in Cusco. "Being completely immersed in something is the only way to learn."

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