

Student Clinical and Research Electives in Cuba

CWRU Faculty Contact: Stuart J. Youngner, MD

**Snail Mail Address: Department of Medicine
University Hospitals
11100 Euclid Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44106-6033**

Phone: 844-3429

Email: sxy2@po.cwru.edu

Background:

Cuba is a country with a population of 10.5 million persons. Since the 1959 Revolution it has had a communist government that has put great resources into building a modern, first-class health care system. In fact, Cuba, a third-world country, now has a first-world health care system including tertiary, secondary, and primary care. There are 20 medical schools and one physician for every 200-250 people. Examples of tertiary care include 2397 kidney transplants, 87 heart transplants, and 3 heart-lung transplants. The primary care system in Cuba is extensive with a family doctor and nurse assigned to 150 to 200 families in a specific geographic area--urban and rural. The physician and nurse live in a house in the neighborhood they serve and have a clinic in the house. Cuba's health care system has been very successful by many standard measures. Infant mortality is better than the USA and longevity about the same. Tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever have been eliminated. Indoor plumbing and potable water are the rule rather than the exception. The excellent dental care is evident when anyone smiles.

Dr. Youngner has visited Cuba 5 times. He has taught courses and seminars in bioethics to Cuban medical students and faculty and developed two ongoing collaborative research projects (one about the definition of death and its relationship to organ transplantation, the other about truth telling to patients with terminal cancer). He has visited medical schools in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Cienfuegos, and Matanzas. In his last visit (January 1997) he met with the deans of the medical schools in Cienfuegos and Matanzas who expressed a keen interest in having medical students from CWRU do clinical or research electives with them in primary care. During his last visit, Dr. Youngner was also appointed adjunct Professor at the Institute of Medicine in Havana, the first academic appointment of a North American in the Cuban Ministry of Public Health since the revolution.

There would be experiences for CWRU 1st year and 4th year students. For fourth year students, the experience would be a one or two month rotation working closely with a family doctor and nurse. For the first year students, it would involve designing a 6 week project to take place over the summer between years one and two.

Students would not go as tourists living in high style. They would live and eat in dormitories with their Cuban medical school colleagues. They would be expected to work and study just as they would on a clerkship in Cleveland. They will be evaluated by their Cuban supervisors. The Cuban Ministry of Public Health will provide room and board as described above.

Cuba is a very interesting and friendly place. It is physically safe and my experience is that Cubans in all walks of life are very glad to meet people from the USA and embrace them with a warmth and friendliness not soon forgotten. Some Spanish is necessary, but students will be assigned to physicians who speak English fluently.