

Confronting HIV/AIDS in the Dominican Republic

During the summer between her first and second year of medical school, USF College of Medicine student, Kristin Houseknecht, had the opportunity to spend two weeks in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic as part of the Medical Student Summer Research Program supervised by Dr. John Sinnott. USF Health is forming a partnership with the Dominican national HIV/AIDS program, known as COPRESIDA, and is developing opportunities for collaborative learning and training. Kristin shared her experience in the Dominican Republic:

While working with physicians and medical students in Santo Domingo hospitals and clinics, I developed a deeper understanding of the challenges faced in confronting HIV/AIDS in the Dominican Republic. A physician's treatment decisions are shaped by those resources available, and it was eye-opening to see how limited availability of anti-retroviral drugs and prophylaxis against opportunistic infections often had tragic implications for patients.



Kristin and two of the physicians working for COPRESIDA



Dr. Gisele Vasquez (center, with flowers) and the other physicians assisting in the promotors training program

One of COPRESIDA's most promising efforts to confront HIV/AIDS involves establishing a prevention and awareness campaign led by *promotores*, who are community health care workers. My most memorable experience while in the Dominican Republic involved participating in a three day training conference with several hundred *promotores*. The *promotores* received training in prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and worked with physicians to develop action plans to take back to their communities. Their enthusiasm was very exciting and inspiring. I had a great experience and I hope to return to the Dominican Republic to complete an elective rotation during my fourth year of medical school.