

**Article written for the weekly newsletter of the Office of Student Professional Enrichment, a program within the George Washington University School of Medicine for students interested in enhancing their scholarly and professional opportunities while still in medical school. Newsletter was distributed online to multiple groups of students, faculty and administrators within the medical school, as well as to administrators and staff members of the Medical School's Dept. of Development. I served in a temp role as program associate and was responsible for compiling the newsletter, which included descriptions of program lectures and events, and information about presentations, conferences, and fellowship opportunities.**

---

## **Dr. Ellyse Weinstein Lecture: "Pregnant Women and Community Clinics in Latin America"**

**Rachel Korr**

How do baby formula, tortillas, and a warm smile relate to first-year medical students?

Those attending Dr. Ellyse Weinstein's lecture on serving the needs of pregnant women in marginal communities in Latin America learned that these items represent three key dimensions of response: material, physical, and emotional. Weinstein works with students in the Global Health Scholarly Concentration cohort of the Office of Student Professional Enrichment in GW's School of Medicine, and for two decades has been affiliated with a number of nonprofit organizations working with underserved populations in Mexico, Guatemala and Nicaragua, among other places. But her other passion remains teaching the next generation of doctors about informing and empowering women trying to raise families in poverty.

This was evident in the lively discussion that filled the lecture hall both during and after Weinstein's presentation. Weinstein explained that women in these communities often distrust outsiders or see no reason to take the time and effort to reach a clinic. The promise of basic resources can both attract the reticent and provide a means of instruction once they are there, such as in nutritional needs while pregnant (nobody eats just tortillas, she clarified - attendees get a demonstration, a feast, and food to take home). And then there are the questions that can be asked.

"These women often may not know that entire aspects of their lives they take for granted, like the distance they walk for water every day or the fact that their husband may want ten children despite their finances and she may not, are highly relevant to this pregnancy and those to come," Weinstein said. "That's where the warm smile comes in - 'I'm not prying, I am genuinely interested, I really care, and I want you to know your experience matters and you can have some say in it.'" It's not just about giving some vitamins and an examination and saying goodbye, she emphasized. The goal is to build trust and become a resource that will be used - and to train local women to take on clinical and community health roles as well.

One student asked whether these lines of questions might be seen as intrusive, an outsider imposing their values on a foreign community. Weinstein lauded the student for her concern but explained that clinics serve as teaching outposts only - no one is forcing anyone to do anything they don't want to. Rather, they provide workshops not only for these women but for anyone from the community, and individual meetings to enhance women's understandings of their needs while pregnant and of strategies for family planning with or without contraception. More often than not, she said, the women themselves show savvy awareness of their situations, may have already discussed matters with their husbands, and express a desire to take on greater agency within their families and to help their families.

Following the discussion, several students stayed to chat with Weinstein about their aspirations to fit work in development into their overall medical careers. It was clear that they were both inspired and rather intimidated by the sheer scope of her experience - Weinstein maintains an active triple schedule as a lecturing professor, OB/GYN, and especially during the summer, consultant and field practitioner in Latin America. She encouraged them to start slowly, taking advantage of opportunities through OSPE to secure medical internships abroad in the summer and remembering to consider local opportunities in community health as well. She noted that each will find their own path - there are many ways to experience the satisfaction of using one's expertise to heal, teach and empower others.

Then they all joined the rest of the group already lunching on fajitas at the back of the room.

*For more information about the OSPE program and opportunities, go to <https://smhs.gwu.edu/oso/>.*