



# Student Creates Exchange Program with Hospital in Brazil to Care for the Underserved

Exposing medical students to different cultures and health care needs through a new international exchange program – and helping patients in need at the same time – are the goals behind the Beatriz Project.



Nicole Dias de Souza joins the prevention team on a trip to Cunjubin, near Barretos, where the Hospital de Amor is working with Ambulatório Médico de Especialidades to improve training



of local public health care providers, for a project known as Matriciamento.

The ambitious venture is the creation of Nicole Dias de Souza, an M.D./M.P.H. student at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

Dias de Souza was inspired to pursue medicine and make a difference at an early age. “My sister was born with congenital cardiac abnormalities and died at an early age in a hospital in Brazil. I found out about my sister’s death when I was four years old. I remember thinking ‘I want to be a doctor when I get older.’” She named the Beatriz Project in honor of her sister.

The services she and other medical students provide for underserved patients at the San Juan Bosco Clinic and Jackson Memorial Hospital also motivated her to act. These essential health care services tend to drop off during the summer. Bringing international medical students to South Florida to bridge the summer months is part of her plan.

After completing the medical student field experience at the Hospital de Amor in Barretos, SP, Brazil during the summer of 2018, “I knew that I had found the perfect institution to partner with in the foundation of the Beatriz Project.”

Advice and support from faculty mentors was another essential piece. She has worked with Gilberto Lopes, M.D., M.B.A., medical director for international programs at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and associate professor of clinical medicine, Edmundo Carvalho Mauad, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Hospital de



Amor and all of its outreach programs, and Alberto J. Caban-Martinez, D.O., Ph.D., M.P.H., C.P.H., a member of Sylvester and assistant professor in the Department of Public Health Sciences at the Miller School of Medicine.

Dr. Caban-Martinez helped Dias de Souza develop the project. The pilot phase with two exchange students from the Miller School of Medicine and two from Hospital de Amor will start this summer.



Nicole Dias de Souza and Leticia Ferro Leal, Ph.D., researcher of human genomics at the Research Biomedical Center at the Hospital de Amor, visit the new



lung cancer preventive mobile unit, which is equipped with an MRI, a medical grade elevator and a waiting room.

“Seeing her enthusiasm and sense of mission, it was easy to see this is an initiative I should support,” Dr. Lopes said.

The Hospital de Amor in Barretos, Brazil, is a privately owned public facility and “an international symbol of what public health care systems ought to resemble,” Dias de Souza said. Multiple learning options and outreach opportunities await Miller students who travel to the region: a children’s hospital, a palliative care hospital, and mobile units focused on preventive programs such as breast, cervical, prostate, colon and lung cancer. Opportunities extend to the Ambulatório Médico de Especialidades, affiliated with the Hospital de Amor.

The nearby largest biobank of tissue samples in South America, as well as a state-of-the-art biomedical institution, add options for students seeking research experience.

The Brazilian medical students who come to South Florida can do a rotation at Sylvester or volunteer at an observational level at different Miller School clinics. The program encourages exchange students across many medical specialties, not just oncology.

Hospital de Amor has cutting-edge technology, including the only IRCAD in Latin America, a robotic-assisted institute for



training in minimally invasive surgical procedures. However, it is located in a rural area, so the patients are mostly farmers and people with low socioeconomic status, Dias de Souza said. It serves as a large referral center for people from all of Brazil.

One essential piece already in place is a memorandum of understanding among the Miller School, the Hospital de Amor and other Brazilian institutions, which recognizes and promotes collaborations between the physicians, staff and students at each facility.

“As a student-led initiative, the Beatriz Project has the potential to help physicians improve our perspectives on the early detection and treatment of cancer, leading to better results,” Dr. Lopes said.

Another benefit of the Beatriz Project is exposing medical students to health care services and patients in a different setting. Dias de Souza said, “Getting out of your comfort zone, being uncomfortable and overcoming different obstacles, is a great way to understand other people not only as a future physician, but as a human being as well.”

“I have big dreams” for the Beatriz Project, she said. Plans include community outreach initiatives to screen the residents of South Florida for earlier diagnosis of colon cancer, cervical cancer, prostate cancer, breast cancer and more.

“Early detection means everything,” she said.