

Our Mission

The Program in Global Mental Health Program at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai enhances access to mental health care for people in East Harlem and around the world. Our program develops, trains, and educates ISMMS students, residents, and faculty to provide mental health services to those who need them most.

Assisting the Children of HaitiChildren from Afar

Ali Haidar, MD, Mount Sinai Hospital



A screenshot from one of the remote check-ins. Clockwise from top-left: Dr. Glenn Martin, Dr. Ali Haidar, Mr. Gerald Oriol Jr and Dr. Circee Phara Jean (both members of the HaitiChildren team).

For the past academic year, I have had the pleasure of working with the team at HaitiChildren in what has been a very enriching experience as a trainee. My professional passion is to advocate for the mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents, and I believe that to be optimal, mental health care has to be understood with a cultural lens. Although experts largely agree on what constitutes psychiatric illness across cultures, the drives and definitions of what constitutes good mental health vary from one culture to the other and one context to the next. The HaitiChildren team has been very welcoming and open in trusting me as a consultant with the wellbeing of the children under their care. I learned to appreciate what's important for the team over there as they walked me through the day to day lives of the children and adolescents at the orphanage. I am thankful for the team at HC for helping me understand what mattered most to the children and staff members over there. I approach this experience with humility as I learn from the team at HC about the nuances relevant to the context in Haiti and how they think my expertise could be of help.

Though I have not met any of the children, I feel they were painted to me through the caring and loving eyes of everyone I worked with. COVID19 has also prevented us from being able to meet in person to set goals for our work. However, working remotely via Zoom has allowed me, along with my supervisor Dr. Glenn Martin, to be present for a longer period than typical on such experiences. The ability to check in every few weeks has helped us forge better relationships with the team at HaitiChildren and allowed for more time to respond to the emerging needs of the clinicians and staff as the year progressed. These longitudinal experiences were bittersweet. As I got to learn about updates and progress that some children made, I also heard about the many losses the center has suffered in the past year with the loss of beloved members of the HC family. The security situation in Haiti has also become more challenging for our partners, and we have to find ways of supporting the staff members through that as they try to shelter the children from the ongoing turmoil outside the walls of the campus. After all, ensuring that the caregivers themselves are able to practice self-care is imperative in any system of care.

I have greatly appreciated my time with the team at HC and I wish to one day be able to visit the people that I have been seeing via screens and learn further from their experiences and get to meet the young kids I have heard so much about.

Dr. Haidar has been providing consultations on a weekly basis to the staff of HaitiChildren's residence in Williamson, Haiti along with Dr. Glenn Martin as his supervisor. The remote nature of their work has permitted them to sustain their efforts over many months.

Program Partnerships:

- Instituto Terapéutico y Psicológico para la Familia, Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic
- Grenada Ministry of Health
- AMPATH, Kenya
- HaitiChildren, Williamson, Haiti
- The Minds Foundation, in collaboration with GMERS Medical College and Sumandeep Vidyapeeth University, Gujarat, India
- The Aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011
- The Carter Center and the Ministry of Health, Monrovia, Liberia
- Belize Ministry of Health
- East Harlem Health Outreach Project
- Human Rights Work with Migrants, New York, New Jersey, and Texas



Human Rights Work on Behalf of Detained Immigrants

*Tomas Restrepo Palacio MD, PGY-4/Chief Resident,
Mount Sinai Morningside and West*

Pictured above: Dr. Restrepo Palacio's hometown of Medellín, Colombia.

I was born in a beautiful Latin American country full of flowers, with hundreds of species of orchids that grow next to the traffic lights of busy streets, and where bands of macaws fly by the high-rise buildings every afternoon looking for food and shelter in the palm trees and lush green trees of our colonial-era parks. As in most of the developing world, the overwhelming natural beauty serves sometimes as a distraction for the political turmoil and the violence that has reigned for generations. This turmoil still manifests in the form of delinquency, gang violence, poverty, abysmal inequality, despotic rulers, drug wars and armed militias that kidnap, torture and massacre our people.

When I was twelve years old, my father was a victim of that violence. While trying to contribute to the peace effort, he participated in negotiations with the guerillas and paramilitary groups, which eventually ended up targeting him. As a result, he was persecuted, threatened, and forced to go into hiding, away from his family which stayed behind in the city. My mother, like many Latin American women, has always been an example of resilience and strength, and she distracted us from the fear of losing our father by taking us to enjoy the beauty of the countryside and the diversity of our country's birds. Our aunts filled our hearts with prayers to the Virgin Mary pleading for our protection and safety. Finally, after months of waiting, a temporary peace was achieved, and we were able to reunite again with my father and rebuild our lives.

I left my country seven years ago and I consider myself fortunate because despite my traumatic experience, I was not forced to leave. Although safety was on my list of reasons, I primarily came to the U.S. seeking opportunities to grow academically and professionally. I am privileged because I had time to plan my trip, I had my family's support, I had a valid work visa, and I felt welcomed in this country.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for many people that have to flee their countries without preparation, without notice, and in fear for their lives. Definitely not the case of a Central American mother that I met while doing my Global Mental Health rotation and working on her asylum case in March. She was a prominent figure in her community, enjoying the fruits of her hard work in a restaurant that she started as a street cart and grew to be one of the most famous stops on the Pan-American Highway in her region.

Exercising her right to protest against the tyranny of her government, during a peaceful march she was captured by police officers and put in jail with other protesters in a small cell. For fourteen days, she was tortured, called derogatory names, starved and beaten and treated worse than any Hollywood movie could portray.

Program Faculty & Residents

Faculty

- Cindy Aaronson, PhD
- Amy Aloysi, MD, MPH
- Ben Angarita, MD
- Rachel Fischer, MD
- Ludwing Florez-Salamanca, MD
- Vicki Gluhoski, PhD
- Gary Katzman, MD
- Jeffrey Kleinberg, PhD, MPH
- Daniella Loh, MD
- Glenn Martin, MD
- Anna Rosen, MD
- Elizabeth Visceglia, MD
- Hiwot Woldu, MD
- Robert Yanagisawa, MD

PGY-3

- Kousanee Chheda, MD
- Hillary Duenas, MD
- Melissa Kelley, MD
- Isobel Rosenthal, MD, MBA
- Harshit Sharma, MD

PGY-4

- Timothy Becker, MD
- Dhruv Gupta, MD
- Peter Joe, MD
- Khushbu Majumdar, MD
- Brittany McCoy, MD
- Honey Win, MD

PGY-5

- Priyanka Adapa, MD

After being left, severely wounded and alone in a landfill, hours away from her family, and hometown, she was able to contact friends that sheltered her. With no access to a hospital due to the fear of being reported to the police, her fractures healed in malunion leaving her with chronic pain. Despite the physical pain, she told me that her sadness and pain actually came from not being able to see her family and from being separated from her children. A pain that I could relate to so closely due to my own experience, but at the same time so distant from anything I could ever imagine given the shocking severity of her trauma.

While I comfortably took a direct flight to the U.S., she had to walk in her condition, through four countries. While my process of entering this country took around one hour in an air-conditioned room at JFK airport, her process has taken months, in a detention center that used to be a jail. She continues to have no access to proper medical care for her wounds and she is afraid to ask for pain medications fearing that her physical ailments might get in the way of her asylum process. In this setting, she has to relive her trauma every day as she goes back to bed in a cell.

Asylum evaluations can take many hours and are very different from a regular psychiatric intake interview. You have time to get to know a person's past, how they viewed their land, the flowers and the birds that make their countries so beautiful, and the social, political, and cultural aspects that forced them to leave their families. You also delve into the violence that drove them to take dangerous paths to come to this promising country where they hope they will finally be free and safe.

At the end of our meeting, I showed her a small figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a symbol of hope that has guided many Latin American people through the hardships of countless painful moments. My eyes watered as she cried and thanked me for giving her the opportunity to see an image of the Virgin, a right that she was denied in the detention center. Asylum evaluations allow us to connect with people beyond the strict boundaries of the practice of psychiatry, giving us the opportunity to provide care and support from our hearts and souls, to aid in the delivery of the promise of getting closer to freedom and safety.

It is our duty as healthcare providers and privileged global citizens to fight for the prevalence and maintenance of human rights and to provide help to those in need. A great way to do this is through asylum mental health evaluations. There are countless individuals and families leaving their countries everyday due to violence and inequalities that come to the U.S. to seek sanctuary. By dedicating a few hours of our time, we can write a compelling evaluation, which can help to release someone from a detention center and open the doors for appropriate medical treatment and a new life.

Dr. Restrepo Palacio focused his field work in the global mental health residency track on conducting human rights evaluations with immigrant detainees in partnership with the American Friends Service Committee Immigrants Rights Program of Newark, New Jersey.

Check out our Program in Global Mental Health Website!

<https://icahn.mssm.edu/education/medical/md-program/global-mental-health>

Program In Global Mental Health Remote Field Project Reports & Spring Fundraiser Wednesday June 2 at 6pm Zoom Meeting ID: 897 1830 4280 Passcode: 286936	Belize	Haiti
	Dominican Republic	Grenada
	Liberia	Immigrant Detention
	India	

Please Join Us in Support of our Residents, Faculty, Site Partners, and Program!