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## AV CPHT Partner Takes a Field Trip to Cuba

By *Mary Cummings*

In September 2023, Mary Cummings, Jo Ellen Vasquez, and Silvia Salomon had the opportunity to travel to Cuba. They are the Chief Executive Officer, Chief of Finance, and Chief Risk Management Officer from Bartz-Altadonna Community Health Center, a Community Public Health Team (CPHT) partner from Antelope Valley (AV) CPHT who visited Cuba to learn about the healthcare delivery system in the country, which helped inspire the CPHT project in Los Angeles County.

Mary, Jo Ellen, and Silvia participated in a guided tour with Global Exchange, an international human rights organization who are a legally authorized provider of travel to Cuba from the United States. On the first day of the tour, they met with the Ministry of Public Health in Cuba (MINSAP) and learned about their work in providing public health education. In Cuba, healthcare starts in the neighborhood: a community-based health facility called a polyclinic. They met one of the polyclinic directors, who explained that most doctors live above their clinic which makes them well respected and known in their community. They also visited the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), a non-governmental organization that fosters people to people diplomacy through solidarity with groups worldwide.

Over the next couple of days, they visited the Cuban National Center for Sex Education, the Fidel Castro Center of Studies, a mental health center, and a maternity home. At the maternity home, they observed a meeting with health professionals on care for pregnant women at the polyclinic level. Polyclinics take care of mothers throughout pregnancy and provide living rooms and spaces to house any pregnant women who need additional extended care.

On the final day, they visited an elderly care facility. They observed various activities to address the care and daily needs of elderly patients. Within the facility, there is a school for young students that trains in elderly care. They also met Cuban doctors belonging to the Henry Reeve Brigade, a group of physicians who work in other countries.

Mary, Jo Ellen, and Silvia returned from Cuba inspired. They saw how Universal Healthcare, funded by the state, in partnership with social service agencies can and does work. It is a system that removes patient barriers to care and delivers healthcare by addressing the socio-economic determinants of health. The trip provided exceptional knowledge they can apply in the AV CPHT project. Mary, Joe Ellen, and Silvia learned that “meeting people where they are and eliminating barriers with knowledge of communities and social determinants of health will enable them to be partners in their wellness care. Those who deliver services must integrate themselves into the community, treat patients non-judgmentally and consistently evaluate ongoing patient and community needs” Bartz-Altadonna Community Health Center.



Jo Ellen Vasquez, CFO, Mary Cummings, CEO, and Silvia Salomon, CRMO, of Bartz-Altadonna Community Health Center, met with healthcare leaders and doctors in Cuba.

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Bartz-Altadonna Community Health Center