Introduction:
During my two week visit to Panama, I met with some possible partners and collaborators who were all interested in the possibility of collaborating with the University of Michigan on clinical and research opportunities. My visit began by meeting Dr. Newton Osborne on June 7, 2011 in Panama City. In my discussions with him, he mentioned a lot of the issues he faces as an OB/GYN in David, Panama, such as malformations, hypertension, malnourishment, pesticide effects, and HPV, which pose interesting opportunities for medical students both in the clinic and the field.

University of Panama:
With Dr. Newton Osborne, I met with the current Dean of the University of Panama – Dr. Julio Rodriguez. We briefly discussed research at the University of Panama, and I quickly realized there is little to no research conducted there. Unlike in the United States where Universities focus on research, in Panama the Universities focus more on teaching. Therefore, the University of Panama is a great partner for clinical opportunities around the country.

In order to gain access to many clinical sites in Panama, an MOU with the University of Panama is highly recommended. For clinical rotations, Dr. Lilibeth Castillero (prof_castillero@yahoo.com) emailed us with the documentation students would require in order to rotate in a certain specialty. This includes:

- Letter of request from the medical student addressed to the Dean (Dr. Julio Rodriguez) specifying the time frame, specialties, and a brief explanation of why the student desires to rotate at the University of Panama School of Medicine
- Letter from the Dean or Director of Medicine from Michigan
- Passport Copy
- International Health Insurance
- University Transcripts (original and copy)
- CV
- Four ID photos
- Immunization record
- Spanish ability
- Student must dress in all white

Some of the clinical sites I visited that can be accessed with an MOU or other collaboration with the University of Panama are: Hospital Santo Tomas and Hospital del Niño. However, after speaking directly with the head of the Hospital del Niño, we could make a direct collaboration with them and do not necessarily have to work through the University of Panama.
Hospital Santo Tomas:

Background on Hospital Santo Tomas:

It is the largest public hospital run by the Panamanian Ministry of Health and serves as a major teaching hospital in the country. In speaking with various physicians around the country, many note that the population served is primarily uninsured with a low level of education. Patients are usually referred to this hospital due to their advanced disease and need for specialized care, such as advanced TB, AIDS, eclampsia, and leishmaniasis. This clinical site is highly recommended by many physicians I have spoken with.

Website: http://www.hst.gob.pa/

Main Contact: Dr. Rita Vasquez – Chief of Teaching Program/Faculty (Jefe de Docencia) (hstdocenciainvestigacion@yahoo.com)
Secondary Contacts: Dr. Gilma Espinosa – Chief of Quality (Jefe de Calidad) (gilmaespinosa2008@hotmail.com)
Dr. Marta Quiodettis – Chief of Trauma (traumahst@gmail.com)

On June 16, 2011, Dr. Newton Osborne and I met with Dr. Gilma Espinosa and Dr. Marta Quiodettis. Although I was unable to meet with the Dr. Rita Vasquez, the Chief of the Teaching Program/Faculty, I was able to get her contact information and she should be contacted in the future. In my discussion with Dr. Espinosa and Dr. Quiodettis, they mentioned the diversity of patients and clinical opportunity at Santo Tomas. Depending on the rotation, the ratio of patients and students varies, so an exact number was not obtained. I mentioned that obstetrics and infectious disease is an area of interest for our potential clinical rotations. Obstetrics tends to be a busy rotation because all medical students are required to take it, but there are opportunities in OB pathology. Also, infectious disease has space for students, and I was particularly interested in the TB unit they have at the hospital, however, I was unable to visit it.

As for Spanish speaking abilities for students, they recommend the student speak Spanish because they will benefit more from patient interactions. However, students should be able to manage with a basic to intermediate level as long as other students on the team are accommodating.
Outside view of the Hospital Santo Tomas
Waiting area of the Hospital Santo Tomas

Trauma/ER area of the Hospital Santo Tomas
Supplies in the trauma/ER area of the Hospital Santo Tomas

Patient care areas in the trauma/ER area of the Hospital Santo Tomas
Obstetrics patient care area of the Hospital Santo Tomas

Obstetrics area of the Hospital Santo Tomas
Hospital del Niño:

Background:
Since its establishment in 1951, the hospital has served as the largest pediatric hospital in the country and is the most important pediatric teaching site.

Website: [http://www.hn.sld.pa/](http://www.hn.sld.pa/) (General), [http://www.hn.sld.pa/contenido/pasant%C3%AD](http://www.hn.sld.pa/contenido/pasant%C3%AD) (Visiting medical student rotations information)

Main Contact: Dr. Claude Vergés de López – Chief of Teaching/Faculty (Jefe de Docencia) ([docenciahdn@hotmail.com](mailto:docenciahdn@hotmail.com)) ([vergeslopez@hotmail.com](mailto:vergeslopez@hotmail.com))

I met with Dr. Claude de Lópe on June 9, 2011 to discuss opportunities at the Children’s Hospital focused on infectious diseases. She mentioned Dr. Elizabeth Castaño would be a good person to meet with during my visit; however, she was unavailable at the time. Dr. Claude de Lópe was very interested in a possible collaboration with Michigan and proceeded to give me information about rotations for visiting medical students. She mentioned rotations could vary in length from 15 days to 3 months. Similarly to Hospital Santo Tomas, the Hospital del Niño has the most advanced cases and treats some of the most disadvantaged populations.

The above website has all the documentation students would need and should be sent to Dr. Claude de Lópe. If planning on doing an infectious disease rotation, then the documentation would also be sent to Dr. Elizabeth Castaño ([elicastano@cwpanama.net](mailto:elicastano@cwpanama.net) or chabecast@yahoo.es) and Dra. Dora Estripeaut C. ([destripeaut@gmail.com](mailto:destripeaut@gmail.com)). The documentation to be sent includes:

- Letter addressed to the Director of the Hospital, Dr. Alberto Bissot Alvarez, with a copy to Dr. Claude Vergés de López, explaining objectives, duration, start and end dates, and the desired specialty of rotation
- Letter from the Dean or Director of Medicine from Michigan
- Meet all immigration requirements
- Passport Copy
- International Health Insurance
- Immunization record
- Certificate or proof of housing in country
- Letter of commitment to return to home country
- CV
- University Transcripts
- 2 passport size photos
External view of the Hospital del Niño
Another external view of the Hospital del Niño
One of the waiting rooms in the Hospital del Niño

Patient care area in the Hospital del Niño
Gorgas Institute:
As possible research partners within Panama, I met with the Director of the Gorgas Institute. Most of the research conducted in Panama is conducted at the Gorgas Institute. Therefore, the Gorgas Institute is the best option for research collaboration with Michigan.

Website: www.gorgas.gob.pa

Background on the Gorgas Institute:
The Gorgas Institute was established in 1921 by Dr. Belisario Porras, President of the Republic of Panama, in honor of Dr. William Crawford Gorgas who eradicated the yellow fever in Panama during the construction of the Canal. In 1928, the facilities were inaugurated and in 1929 the Scientific Library of the Institute was created.

Main Contact: Dr. Nestor Sosa – Director of the Gorgas Institute (drnsosa@gmail.com)
I met with Dr. Nestor Sosa on June 9, 2011. During this meeting, he described the research conducted more in detail. The research at the Institute is primarily lab-based bench research or community-based research focused on tropical diseases and public health. They have more than 100 investigators at the Institute that could directly mentor a Michigan medical student over the course of a 1-3 month research trip. He recommended the students insert themselves on an investigation already being conducted within the Institute based on the student’s interest. As for the level of Spanish language abilities, students choosing to do bench research can speak primarily English, however, for a community-based project, students should be able to understand and communicate in Spanish.

Dr. Nestor Sosa and the Gorgas Institute are very interested in establishing a relationship with the University of Michigan. According to him, the following steps in order to establish research opportunities between Michigan and Gorgas would include having Michigan email Dr. Nestor Sosa at the Gorgas Institute the Michigan MOU, then the lawyers in Panama will review it, and steps will be taken for its approval. Once an MOU with Michigan is established, students that choose to do a research rotation with Gorgas would email Enilda Echeveres (Coordinadora de Capacitación) at eechevers@gorgas.gob.pa with their CV and other information she requests, then she would work to place them in touch with possible research mentors.
Doctor Osborne and me outside the Gorgas Institute

External view of one of the Gorgas Institute’s labs