



Bradley Lezak, M.D./M.P.H. candidate, Begins Surgical Mission in the Peruvian Amazon



This past summer, Bradley Lezak, a second-year M.D./M.P.H. candidate, completed his public health field experience in Pucallpa, Peru, working with Scalpel at the Cross

(<https://scalpelatthecross.org/>)

(SATC), an orthopedic surgical non-profit organization that has been serving the region since 2005, on the development of a new prosthetics and physical therapy clinic in the remote-Peruvian town.

“Pucallpa is located in the Amazon jungle of Peru and is about 30 miles west of the Brazilian border. Having done my field experience in an underserved setting was a perfect opportunity for me to combine global health with my passion for orthopedics,” Lezak said.

When Lezak was in sixth grade, he fractured his tibia and fibula – the bones between the knee and ankle – while playing football. While this was a painful experience, it was also an experience that sparked his passion for orthopedics.

“That injury introduced me to medicine in general and to orthopedic surgery specifically. The orthopedic surgeons treated the injury during an emergency surgery that I had the very next day,” Lezak said.

This urgency is one of Lezak’s goals for the anticipated prosthetics and physical therapy clinic in Pucallpa, as the number of deaths from orthopedic injury worldwide exceeds the number of deaths from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined.

While the corporate office for SATC is in Miami, the organization has a campus and full-time staff in Pucallpa. They have also purchased more land for the development of the clinics.

Peggy T. Gasior, COO and mission director of SATC, said that Lezak’s field experience included five main objectives. The first was to conduct a needs assessment in Pucallpa, including identifying medical utilization needs of the community, current resources, as well as SATC’s past work in the village.

The other four consisted of creating a business plan for the prosthetics and orthotics lab, as well as for the physical therapy clinic. Lezak will also have to participate in creating a three-to-five-year plan for the construction of a campus housing the clinic and lab and study the ten most extraordinary orthopedic trauma cases in Pucallpa and in the region.

“Bradley’s work with Scalpel at the Cross this summer fulfilled objective No. 1, which helped him establish connections and relationships with our local staff, missionaries, and partners in Peru. That work has resulted in the scholastic article that is in the process of publication,” Gasior said.

Before traveling to Peru this summer, he spent three weeks conducting preliminary research at the University of Minnesota Regions Hospital with Dr. Peter Cole, who is chief of orthopedics at the hospital, orthopedic section head for HealthPartners, and co-founder of SATC.

While in his three-week stay in Minnesota, Lezak served as a lead author on the paper that, as he was recently notified, will be published in the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery within the next month.

“We wrote the paper on the history and implementation of the mission trips of the organization, as well as some of the challenges that we’ve had and then how other people can use it as a blueprint in the future. While in Minnesota, I also became familiar with orthopedic surgery in a clinical sense, so that I could be helpful in the operating room once I got to Pucallpa.”

From Minnesota, Lezak flew to Miami to board a direct flight to Peru, where he began the mission trip conducting triage as soon as he arrived. Triage is distinguishing degrees of urgency to wounds or illnesses to decide the order of treatment for patients. Lezak and the SATC team saw approximately 100 patients during a ten-day campaign.

“I was also able to help with the surgeries in minimal ways, which was a great learning experience. We would conduct six or seven surgeries a day from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. at night,” Lezak said.

Lezak participated in 20 surgeries. He and the team also stayed for post-operative management of the patients, to ensure follow-up. SATC has invested in an outcomes program to follow up with patients after undergoing high-risk surgeries.

In February, Lezak will be visiting Pucallpa to continue to meet his objectives. As he has met with the people who will build the clinic in Pucallpa, he has a better understanding of how the clinic will be built. They will have five patient rooms, as well as a couple of operating rooms. An orthotics and prosthetics lab is also in the works.

“I’ve always wanted to do orthopedic surgery and I really wanted to do something abroad. Thanks to the travel scholarships provided to students at the Department of Public Health Sciences, I got to do just that,” Lezak said.

To learn more about Scalpel at the Cross, click [here](https://scalpelatthecross.org/) (<https://scalpelatthecross.org/>).

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Published on September 10, 2019

Corrected on September 10, 2019