

Africans in the Latin American School of Medicine

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By Nuria Barbosa León

Young Africans of different nationalities are studying at the Latin American School of Medicine, founded on November 15, 1999 during the IX Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government.

Matheus Natangwe Mwelihanyeka, 23 years old and resident of Windhoek, Namibia, is a member of this Cuban project that has trained 31,180 professionals from 122 countries in 20 graduations.

He is currently in her third year of medical school at the Julio Trigo Faculty in Havana and is finding it difficult to learn Spanish: "From the first day, the teacher came to class and spoke to us in Spanish all the time. I thought she would speak to us in English, but he was not fluent in that language. I don't think I'm done learning

Spanish, I keep coming up with new words and phrases. I have a hard time understanding medical or scientific terms.

At the end of the pre-medical course, which lasts 10 months and includes Spanish language and basic high school subjects, he will begin his studies at the Latin American School of Medicine, where she will study basic and preclinical sciences.

"There you study in an atmosphere of solidarity. You share a room with young people from different countries and cultures. I lived with Colombians, Arabs and Africans from countries different from mine. Through them, I learned about the atrocities committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, the Colombian conflict and their desire to build peace, the Muslim religions that exist in Africa, as well as the different ethnic groups," says the young Namibian.

He adds that when he arrived in Cuba, he had difficulties using his cell phone and getting a phone line installed, but the Palestinians helped him communicate with his family and he has two "very good friends" in that group.

For his third year, he joined one of the 15 faculties that exist in the Cuban capital to rotate through the different hospitals and health institutions, since the study of medicine in Cuba is closely linked to medical practice.

"At the Julio Trigo Faculty, we share classrooms with Cubans, we do medical rotations, we take care of patients, including on-call duty. Here, the rigor of the career makes us focus more on studies, with little time for other activities.

The Cuban students become our families, we spend a lot of time with them, we exchange materials, we do assignments and projects in duos or groups, everyone needs each other and everyone needs the group, we build a different collective chemistry to harmonize," explains Matheus Natangwe Mwelihanyeka.

He adds that classes are held in front of the patient and every six days he is on duty. "We take care of the patients and work out all the contents of the medical records. Then we find a way to make a diagnosis that the teachers will confirm or correct. I can watch surgeries and help with simple tasks. The medical practice is the moment of greatest learning because the professor explains how the clinical or surgical treatment evolves."

At the end of his third year, he feels able to warn of a complicated pathology or of signs and symptoms that make him suspicious in order to identify a disease.

Likewise, this final course allowed him to know more about the Cuban people, although he has the debt to learn to dance casino and have a Cuban girlfriend. "I have a Cuban family that I visit often and I think they already have me as an adopted son," he said with a big smile.



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