

## **MEDICINE AND PHARMACIES IN ECUADOR**

Most of the over-the-counter and prescription medicines that you can get in the U.S. are available in Ecuador without a prescription, but you need to know what you're asking for by the generic name. For example, if you want Robitussin cough syrup you need to know the generic name of Guaifenesin (Expectorant) or for Robitussin DM, Guaifenesin and Dextromethorphan (cough suppressant). If you write these down with a Spanish phonetic spelling, i.e. dextromethorfan (it is actually dextrometorfan, but they would get you the right thing with the previous spelling) the people at the pharmacy will probably be able to give it to you, but then you should ask them what it is for to make sure that you got the right thing (consult your Spanish manual for what cough, mucous, throat, etc. are or just ask the Project Directors). Almost everything you can get in the U.S. is available in Ecuador, and it's usually cheaper, but quite a few medications for depression, anxiety and asthma are not available in Ecuador (you need to bring any prescription medication you need and enough of it to last you during your service time).

If you say Robitussin like we say it, they won't have a clue what you're saying. If you pronounce it Ro-bee-too-seen, they'll know exactly what you're saying. ☺ Robitussin can be found in most of the bigger pharmacies as well as Supermaxi, the big American-style grocery store down there. Halls cough and throat drops are actually in the candy section, but they have them everywhere, including the little stores (tiendas).

You can look up your "favorite" product on the internet by going to the company's web page and looking to see what the active ingredients are, however, **DO NOT JUST GO TO THE PHARMACY AND TELL THEM YOUR SYMPTOMS AND TAKE WHAT THEY GIVE YOU.** In the U.S. this is usually a fairly safe bet as all pharmacies have licensed pharmacists who can generally give you sound advice on what to take for over-the-counter meds. In Ecuador, not only are prescription meds available without a prescription, there doesn't need to be a pharmacist in the building, and you may be getting medical advice from a high school student who knows that Ventolin is sometimes given for a cough...but what he may not know is that it only helps if your cough is caused by asthma, and that it can cause significant problems if given to the wrong patient (even heart attacks in some cases). So please be cautious. Bottom line, if you don't know what you have or exactly what you need, you need to be very careful. The Ecuadorian system is not set up to protect you from your own unwise actions or from the bad advice someone else may give you.