

The ACP Central America Chapter Annual Meeting

February 14-15, 2025

Panama City, Panama

ACP Global Ambassador reflections by: Isaac O. Opole, MBChB, PhD, MACP

This report describes my visit and the takeaways from my invited trip to attend the ACP Central America Chapter Annual Meeting in Panama City, Panama, in February 2025. I made the trip accompanied by my wife, Dr. Rebecca Opole, MD, FACP, who is the current Governor of the Kansas Chapter. It was a smooth arrival in Panama City; we were transported from the airport and accommodated at the Hotel Riu Plaza Panama, which was the host hotel for the meeting. Once settled in, our host Dr. José Franceschi Diaz, Governor of the Central America Chapter, and his wife Judith later took us to dinner at the very delightful Acha restaurant close to the waterfront. It was a delightful evening, warm but not humid, and José and Judith made this a pleasant way to start our visit.



We had built in some rest time on the trip and on our first day Dr. José and Judith picked us up for a tour of the Panama Canal pilot training unit, where large, life-size simulators are used to train canal pilots. I was able to “take the helm” and maneuver a couple of virtual ships in the tugboat around the harbor. It was a unique experience that emphasized the important responsibility that the canal pilots have, and like in medicine, the necessity for rigorous training and preparation before full entrustability. Afterward, we had a fantastic lunch at a traditional Panamanian restaurant, enjoying a variety of authentic local dishes.



That afternoon, we had the opportunity to tour Dr. José Francéschi Diaz's oncology practice at Centro Hemato Oncológico Panama (CHOP), which was centrally located in Panama City. It is a beautiful, state-of-the-art facility located on the upper floors of a building with spectacular views of the harbor and marina. The infusion and patient care suites were well appointed, modern, and comfortable, and all were equipped with state-of-the-art technology.





The evening featured a tour of the old Panama City city center, including the seat of the government. Our hosts then invited us to have dinner with a small group of chapter members and leaders, where we discussed challenges faced by early career physicians in Latin America. Many of the issues were familiar to those we face in the United States, including low remuneration, lower regard for internal medicine physicians who practice primary care, lack of career progression opportunities, and work-related exhaustion and burnout.



We also met for dinner the next day with a group of previous MACPs and Governors of the local chapter, including our good friend Dr. Eric Ulloa, previous Governor of the Central America Chapter. This was a great opportunity to learn about the history of Panama, the origins of the Central America Chapter, and its membership and history.

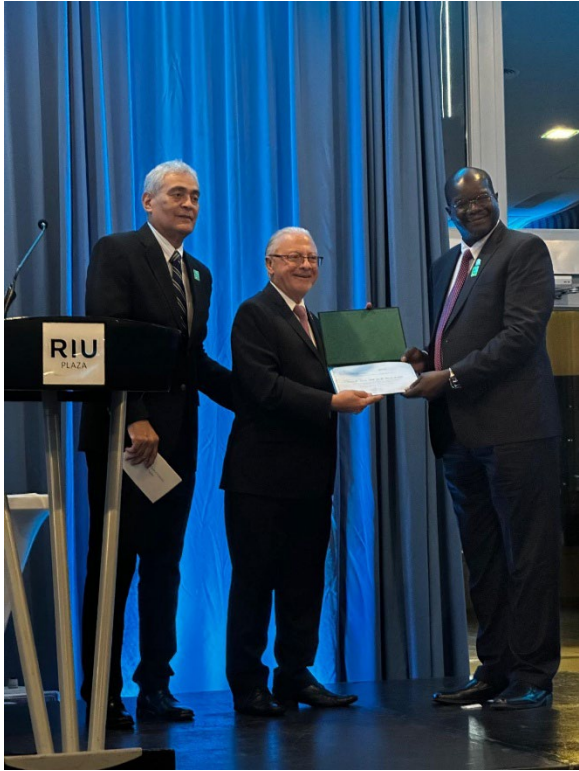


The main chapter meeting started shortly after 8:00 a.m. the next day, with speakers in both English and Spanish. A Spanish to English translator was present for the morning sessions and enabled us to follow the proceedings. After the welcome and opening speeches, there were two initial sessions: “Updates in Psoriatic Arthritis” and “Updates in Diabetes Care.” I then followed with the first of my two talks, “Medical Care of the Surgical Patient,” focusing on risk mitigation and hospitalist co-management of surgical patients. There was a lot of curiosity, especially among younger physicians from the region who are not that familiar with the hospitalist concept. My second talk was on “Perioperative Risk Assessment” and the importance of risk stratification and risk mitigation. Again, these were well received with a variety of questions, although some of the older physicians seemed a bit skeptical about the applicability of the hospitalist concept in Latin American countries. Subsequent sessions were held in Spanish, including the Doctor’s Dilemma® series of qualifying rounds.



The final day of the meeting included a town hall, which was in Spanish without English translation, and additional academic sessions and final Doctor's Dilemma. These were also held in Spanish, which remained a challenge in following the proceedings.

In the evening, we attended the awards and closing ceremony banquet at the Hotel Riu Plaza Panama. This was a very classy event with live music and was well attended by members and dignitaries from each of the member countries, MACPs, and former chapter leaders. Dr. Francéschi Diaz spoke about the importance of ACP in the region in promoting excellence in clinical practice, standards, and collaboration. Dr. Omar Orlando Castillo Fernandez, MD, also spoke on behalf of the Panamanian Society of Internal Medicine, emphasizing the importance of clinical excellence, medical research, and collaborative practice. I also gave a brief speech and thanked them for their amazing hospitality and presented the Chapter Excellence Award to the Governor, Dr. Francéschi Diaz. It is important to note that there is a strong collaboration between the Panamanian Society of Internal Medicine and the Central America Chapter of ACP, including support for the Chapter in funding and hosting the regional meeting, which is a logistical challenge considering the distributed nature of the countries, some of which have very small ACP membership. Dr. Francéschi Diaz has worked hard to increase engagement between the member countries, including the Doctor's Dilemma, whose preliminary rounds are held in member countries and remains a popular draw bringing the membership together.





After the speeches and great food, everyone got on the floor to dance to some excellent live music. Unfortunately, we had to leave the dance floor early to prepare for our flight back to Kansas City the next morning. All in all, our visit to Panama City was enlightening and fun. Many thanks again to my Central American hosts for their amazing hospitality.