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Program: Child Family Health International: Healthcare Challenges in South Africa, Cape Town
Summer 2008

This past summer I spent four weeks in Cape Town, South Africa, a place many world travelers will tell you is an experience you'll remember for the rest of your life. It is located at the southernmost tip of South Africa and it is absolutely one of the most diverse cities you could go to in the world. It has a population of about 3.5 million and its rich and often troubled history creates much of what it is today. Our hosts liked to describe it as a place where you could experience all of any category in one day, and I agree with them after my experience there. We went in the winter time, and you could experience all four seasons (and a fifth counting the rainy season) within a single day. You can go hiking up Table Mountain, which is not that easy, and in an hour or two, sit on the beach or go through the middle of a dense city. You could also go from some of the most expensive and amazingly beautiful houses on the coast to the shantytown that stretches before your eyes like the ocean, with no end in sight of the poverty. The people there sample from all parts of the world, with many Dutch, Malaysian, Indian, and of course African influences. South Africa on the whole recognizes 11 different national languages. Also, the memory of apartheid is still fresh for many people there and it made for a truly educational experience on diversity, culture, and understanding.

Our program had several sites within the Cape Town area and depended on levels of ability. There were four medical students in our program and several pre-medical students. Senior level clinical students rotate alongside physicians at Victoria Hospital, located in the southern suburbs of Cape Town in Wynberg; pre-medical students rotate in a variety of community clinics associated with the Eerste River Hospital in the Cape Flats; nursing students rotate in Mowbray Maternity Hospital in the Mowbray suburbs; and first and second year medical students or PA's rotate through GF Jooste Hospital. Being a first year, I rotated through GF Jooste Hospital as a part of the surgical team, shadowing for the most part and helping their interns go through daily rotations, scrubbing in on surgeries, and helping out with blood draws or other tasks as we spent more time there and learned. I was also able to visit a few other hospitals with my attending to see the difference in the quality of hospitals even within the same city. It was absolutely astonishing how one hospital could look and feel just like an American hospital in terms of resources while another was struggling to have enough alcohol swabs on a day-to-day basis.

The healthcare system in Cape Town is based on townships, or their districts and it is a public system so people go to different level hospitals depending on severity of injury, but within the system of hospitals in their respective townships. GF Jooste is a hospital located in the midst of some of the poorest townships of Cape Town, where shantytowns, poverty, gang fights, and horrible living conditions were the norm. We saw so many more pneumothoraxes than I can count from stab or gun wounds, countless pancreatitis patients who were chronic alcoholics, and so many people with uncontrolled diabetes, wounds and necrotic limbs that nearly half of the orthopedics cases were amputations. The doctors, residents, and interns there were extremely knowledgeable and one of the doctors was actually a Johns Hopkins trained General Surgeon who felt compelled to go help and has been doing great work down there. They welcomed the students warmly, despite what I imagine is a monthly turnover of students through the program, and took time to help educate us as well, even comparing treatments down there to American medical standards. It was absolutely eye opening to see the types of patients coming in and how the doctors worked tirelessly to do what they could despite the impoverished conditions of the people they were serving.

While we were there we were able to stay with host families, 2 to a family, and the family I stayed with was absolutely superb. All the families lived in the same neighborhood which was relatively safe, but absolutely not in the lap of luxury. They were gracious enough to invite me out to

a family friend's birthday party on the first day, who incidentally turned out to be one of the best cricket players in all of South Africa. They were gracious and understanding of everyone's different needs and were more accommodating than I could have ever asked for. While we were there, on the weekends we were able to take a few trips, one weekend up and around the Eastern Cape to go to a Safari at a game reserve and Ostrich Farm (where we were able to ride them as well), another weekend through the wine country where some of the best Syrah's and Shiraz's in the world are made, and yet another weekend to the beaches and up Table Mountain. There were endless activities for us to do while we were there and it enabled us to see just how beautiful the city was. Lastly, we took a tour through the city of Cape Town to learn about apartheid and were able to go into the heart of the shantytowns to see exactly what they were like on the inside. It was one of the richest experiences of my life and I most definitely recommend this program to anyone who wants to go somewhere to get a perspective of medicine in a place where first world and third world medicine are practiced in hospitals only miles apart. Nearly everyone down there speaks English so languages were not an issue and in terms of the program, the coordinators and hosts were really great, and very prepared in terms of providing cell phones and everything we needed to make our stay memorable.



In the heart of historic Cape Town



Just a peek of one of the shantytowns



Assisting on a Surgery



The team of nurses (Sister's) and the doctor I worked with



Kellie (another RWJ student) and I with my host family in front of their house