



Health Care Challenges in South Africa

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Background

The healthcare system and public health concerns in South Africa are closely linked with its history of apartheid. During this era as much as 80% of white South Africans



were covered by private insurance, while nearly 95% of non-white South Africans were reliant on chronically underfunded public healthcare services. However, after Mandela's National African Congress came to power in 1994 several steps were taken to ameliorate healthcare disparities. Today, despite the promise of free neonatal and pediatric healthcare, South Africa remains one of twelve countries where child mortality has increased since 1990. Here the history of apartheid continues to impact health; as a large portion of Cape Town's population reside within informal housings. In this setting the lack of sidewalks and crosswalks, unfettered access to dangerous highways, and lack of indoor heat and hot water, make burns and MVA's a significant source of childhood hospitalization. Indeed, childhood trauma has become a leading cause of mortality, morbidity, and disability in Cape Town. In an effort to address these issues Red Cross War Memorial Children's (RCWMC's) hospital and other NGO's have positioned themselves as leaders in child safety advocacy; creating various seminars, outreach programs, and parental counseling opportunities.



Experiences in the Community

CFHI offered the opportunity to tour the townships of Langa and Khayelitsha. We observed public health concerns linked to hospitalization at RCWMC's Hospital. The crowding and lack of proper crosswalks were associated with a high percentage of TB transmission and MVA-associated trauma. Limited electricity reduced access to heat and hot water, making indoor fire pits necessary. These conditions increased the potential for burns and respiratory distress seen in the hospital setting. NGOs sought to address these conditions. In Khayelitsha, Hope4Health addressed TB transmission via the DOTS method. In Langa, the Mustadifin Foundation improved access to electricity and educated residents regarding the safety of indoor fire pits.

Hospital Experiences

CFHI allowed us to work at the RCWMC's Hospital during our 4 week stay in Cape Town. The first two weeks consisted of volunteering in the Trauma Unit, allowing us to work with pediatric patients suffering from fractures and third degree burns. During the last two weeks we were able to volunteer in the pediatric surgery unit, allowing us to shadow various disciplines including;

- Orthopedic Surgery
- Anesthesiology
- Plastic Surgery
- Neurosurgery

Throughout our stay we attended workshops and lectures regarding suturing, laparoscopy, imaging, surgical procedures, and epidemiologic studies. We also participated in rounds with local physicians and medical students.



Trip Summary

- 2 weeks in Trauma Unit, 2 weeks in Pediatric Surgery at the RCWMC's Hospital
- Lived in a traditional South African home
- Attended healthcare lectures/workshops
- Rounded with local physicians
- Township tours (Khayelitsha and Langa)
- Visited South African attractions



Reasons for going abroad

- Global health interest
- Opportunity to experience South African Culture (home stay family)
- Interest in healthcare delivery in developing nations
- Greater opportunities for involvement
- Building relationships with locals



Attractions

Ecological Diversity

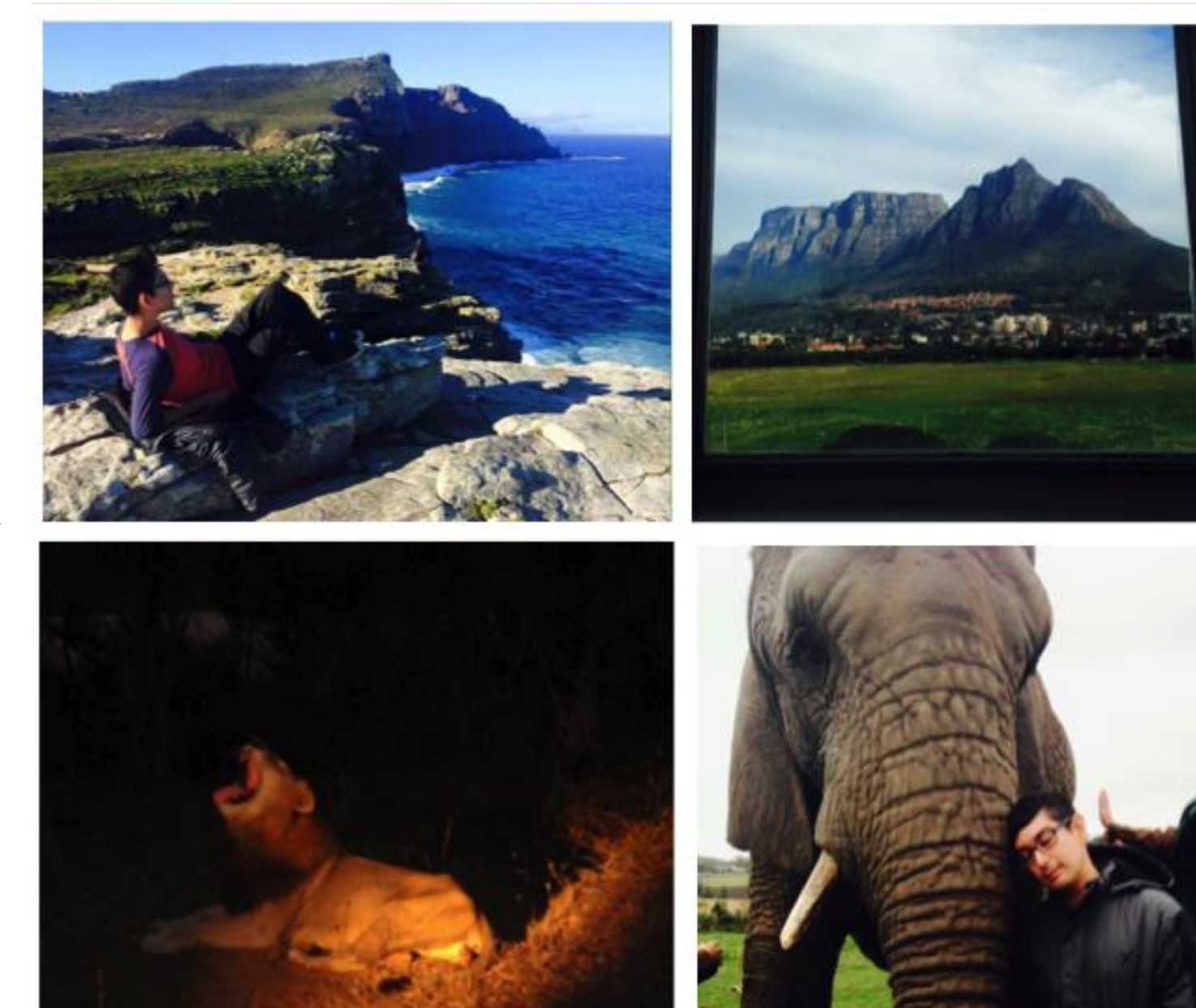
- Table Mountain/Lion's head, landforms that tower over the city
- The Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, World Heritage site
- Garden Route, home to natural cave formations, zip-lining, and ostrich/elephant encounters
- Cape of Good Hope, South-Western most tip of the Africa

Thrill Seekers

- Cage diving with great white sharks
- Safari at Kruger National Park, encounters with lions, leopards, hyenas, and hippo
- Bloukrans Bridge, site of the world's highest bungee jump

Historical Sites

- Robben Island, Nelson Mandela's prison stay, and World Heritage Site
- District 6 Museum, a somber collection of historical relics and accounts of the apartheid era
- Heart Transplant Museum, site of the world's first successful heart transplant



Child Family Health International (CFHI) is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the UN, and provides community-based Global Health Education Programs for students and institutions. It aims to empower local communities, and introduce students to public health concerns and healthcare delivery with a global perspective. Alumni are invited to represent their program as ambassadors locally and globally. They are welcome to participate in additional experiences at reduced cost, and provide insight into development of novel programs.



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