

I didn't want to do research this past summer for several reasons. First of which was that I wanted to do something outdoors, get my hands dirty, not shave for a while, enjoy fresh air. I had done research in undergrad, and didn't relish the idea of spending another summer in a lab or hospital, but I did want something that allowed me to practice my physical diagnosis skills and get good clinical exposure. Secondly, I wanted to do something different. Something challenging. Something that would put me out of my comfort zone. Lastly, I hadn't studied abroad in college and felt that it was high time to experience a culture that was not my own. So where did I chose to go? The Indian Himalayans!



I joined the Himalayan Health Exchange which is “a humanitarian service program bringing together healthcare professionals who give of their time, talent and resources to provide care to the underserved populations in select, remote areas of Indo-Tibetan Borderlands. Each trip combines service and adventure, with team members providing care while also experiencing the land, its natural

environment, people and culture.” Exactly what I was looking for!

Our day usually started off with a breakfast of eggs, potatoes, porridge and either tea or chai cooked for us by, (in my opinion, the best cook in the Himalayans) Nima. Depending on the set-up in the village or monastery where we were staying, we would then either travel in cars to our clinic site via treacherous roads or walk to the town center. We spent some time setting up our tents: three medical, one dental, one triage, one Ob/Gyn, one peds, and one which served as our pharmacy. Each of us rotated through the various tents. Each tent had three medical students and an attending or resident (the residents were Canadians on their rural Family Medicine elective and the attendings were from all over the USA). We each got our own patient and attempted to elicit a history from them with the help of our drivers who also served as translators. This was probably one of the more challenging aspects that we had to deal with since sometimes we had to work through two translators when our drivers didn't speak the local language. Because of this, we were challenged to rely more on our physical exam skills which improved patient by patient. The residents and attendings provided great insight and help in this regard.

I would be remiss if I did not talk about the folks that came to our clinic. The people of the Himalayans often have to travel six or seven hours to the closest hospital and so these clinics are an important aspect of their medical care. They welcomed us into their communities, shared their history, taught us about their religion, and most importantly trusted us with the care of their health. Each village we stayed in had an ancient monastery of some sort, so I had the opportunity to visit many monasteries from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Overall the Himalayan Health Exchange was exactly what I was looking for and the most amazing experience I've had to date.

