

## **Komal Pandya New Delhi, India**

April 22, 2004 My international health elective, which I chose to do in India, proved to be an extremely rewarding experience and an invaluable part of my medical education. I spent over two weeks with a general internal medicine physician in his private practice in New Delhi. My days consisted of seeing patients in the office from 10am to 1pm, followed by hospital rounds in the afternoon and occasionally office hours again in the evening from 6pm to 9pm. However, there was always some time for siesta, as the heat in Delhi during the afternoon hours in May brings most activities to a halt.

During this elective, I was assigned responsibilities that were appropriate for a fourth year medical student, which included taking histories, conducting the physical examinations and devising therapeutic plans. A significant part of my rotation focused on refining my use of the history and the physical exam in the diagnosis and treatment of patients. As most of the health clinics in India are not equipped with a lot of the technology available here in the US, and the patients in India are not as willing to obtain laboratory tests given their financial constraints, physicians in India rely more heavily on their history and physical exam skills. Equipped only with a blood pressure machine, a thermometer and a stethoscope, I had to learn to arrive to the most probable diagnosis without the aid of a CBC, BMP, U/A, stool O&P etc. and then empirically treat such conditions such as UTI, and parasitic infections. This was challenging; as I had to become accustomed to a very different way of practicing medicine. In the US, I was used to ordering numerous lab tests to confirm my suspicions. However, in India I did not have this luxury.

Another fascinating part of my experience with Dr. Trehan was my exposure to more traditional forms of medicine. Although formally trained in allopathic medicine, Dr. Trehan also incorporates ayurvedic and naturopathic medicine into his practice. These ancient forms of medical practices are deeply rooted within the Indian culture. Through his willingness to encompass these traditional methods into his practice, Dr. Trehan demonstrated to me that in order to provide the best care to one's patients, it is important for a physician to be non-judgemental and understand how a person's culture plays a role in his/her health.

Recently, major changes in the health care system have been occurring in India. Private health insurances are becoming more prevalent, which is leading to a shift in the focus of the practice of

medicine. As per Dr. Trehan, there is a "wellness revolution" that has started in India. The people of India are becoming more health conscious, and physicians are placing more emphasis on prevention rather than treatment. Awareness regarding diet, exercise, stress management etc is now being stressed. However, currently, this health awareness is still limited to the educated population of India. During my rotation, I had the opportunity to participate in several public seminars focusing on these issues.

My experience in India has shown me that although the approach of medicine may vary in different parts of the world, the basic concepts remain the same. Being a physician puts us in position to serve not only the people of our country but our fellow brothers and sisters throughout this world. I feel that having this kind of an opportunity to serve people of other nations can prove to be an invaluable growth experience for all medical students.