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### Himalayan Health Exchange: Lahaul, India

I have wanted to visit the Himalayas for a very long time. For that reason, when I was perusing international health opportunities, the programs with the Himalayan Health Exchange appealed to me. Positive accounts from other students and the information available on the website convinced me further that it was the experience I was looking for. And, I am happy to report, the trip was definitely everything I thought it would be and more. I landed in Delhi after a very long plane trip and as soon as I cleared customs, the program took very good care of me and provided me many opportunities to learn and provide help to those in need. The journey to the western Himalayan region in which we set up our clinics was long and at times, harrowing, but our drivers were excellent and we found ourselves becoming more and more appreciative of their skill. The other students, doctors, and additional help on our trip were all very open-minded and positive people, and I was very happy to meet and connect with every single one.

The clinics themselves varied from busy to slow, but all the people we treated were very appreciative, and were willing to accept everything we said, which was a difference from what I have seen in American healthcare. Experiencing the rural environment in which our patients lived was also an enlightening experience, as we learned to deal cope with situations that were unfamiliar to us, such as climbing hills in a high altitude and using rural toilet facilities. The people we saw very often had quite basic complaints, such as back pain and indigestion, but these complaints had a significant impact on their quality of life. We were often frustrated by how little we could accomplish in our temporary, nomadic situation, and at times there were disagreements with local doctors, situations that highlighted our cultural differences. However, overall, we felt we made a positive impact on a lot of lives. We certainly brought some excitement and hope to the local populations.

As a student, I gained a great deal of experience that I would not have had until the third or fourth year of medical school. I took many histories, made diagnoses and recommendations (after being approved by a physician, of course), and dispensed medications. I rotated through stations of internal medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, pharmacy, triage, pediatrics, and dentistry. I learned to deal with the frustrations of translation, sometimes from using two interpreters at once. The total number of patients we saw was around 1500. I also gained powerful insight into another culture, and would love to return and learn more while helping provide more medical care to those in need. I would definitely recommend this program to other students and am strongly considering returning myself, if not in my third or fourth year, then in my later career as a physician.