

## One Medical Student's Rotation in Vellore, India

By Kristen Koniewicz



During our four years of medical school, we are continually adding to our repertoire of medical knowledge. We spend our days interacting with fellow students and working with attending physicians, and we spend our nights studying and consolidating what we learn each day. Most importantly, we engage with community members and learn from our patients every single day. Every so often, we are fortunate enough to be challenged by an environment we are not accustomed to. We have the chance to interact with individuals who represent a culture that is vastly different from our own. When I found out I

would be a part of a medical trip to Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, I looked forward to the prospect of traveling abroad for a rotation. This unique educational opportunity was something in which I took great pride. It is an experience I deeply coveted as I moved along in my medical training. While I had been privy to my program's comprehensive medical training in the United States, I was excited for the chance to take my skills to another country.

My love for travel has introduced me to many countries and nearly every continent, but I had not yet traveled to Asia until this year. Prior to departure, I looked forward to learning about yet another culture. I yearned to take part in the patient-doctor relationship from a different perspective. My rotation in Vellore, India satisfied many of my wishes. I was able to learn about new cultures while playing an active role in medical care of the underserved. Additionally, there was no better opportunity for hands on learning than their busy clinic and hospital. As a future Obstetrician and Gynecologist, I was excited by the access I had to Ob/Gyn care on my rotation in India. I was amazed by the volume of high-risk pregnancies complicated by conditions we rarely see in the United States. I was shocked by some of the cultural differences in the reproduction and infertility clinic pertaining to rules and regulations, but I was amazed by how similar the counseling and procedures were between countries and cultures.



The part of my trip that I valued the most was the time spent traveling with physicians and nurses to patients' homes in urban slums and in rural communities. Visiting local residences permitted interaction with patients in vulnerable settings. Not only was I interacting with patients in their private and personal communities, I was also learning to communicate amidst an intense language barrier. From becoming more cognizant of my body language to learning a few of their most common words, I was truly humbled by these experiences. Another wonderful part of this trip was the afternoon I spent visiting a middle school in an urban slum. I was visiting with social workers from the hospital to teach eighth graders about health and hygiene. Witnessing their enthusiasm for learning and engagement with the teacher was incredibly

rewarding. In addition to that afternoon, I will never forget the day I spent traveling to India's first Leprosy hospital. The resiliency of the patients and the dedication of their providers was unmatched. I heard their stories about personal struggles with their diagnosis, and I was in awe as they told us about their strength in overcoming the stigma of living with Leprosy in India. These experiences helped me further cultivate my humility and appreciate the closeness of the patient-provider relationship that is pervasive between cultures and continents.

Overall, words cannot describe how sincerely I appreciated the opportunity to travel to CMC Vellore on this four-week rotation. I genuinely cherished the chance to embody the determination and ambition of a US medical student, all while interacting with medical students from other institutions and sharing in these experiences. I firmly believe that my month in India helped me grow into a more well-rounded practitioner. I strongly encourage anyone interested in participating in a medical rotation abroad to commit to the experience. You will learn a great deal about another culture, about medicine, and about yourself along the way.



