

## **Integration of Family Planning into HIV Care in Nairobi, Kenya**



During the spring of my fourth year of medical school, I had the unique opportunity to spend six weeks in Nairobi, Kenya at an outpatient HIV care facility. There, I was able to experience the full spectrum of HIV services in the departments of pediatrics, adult medicine, social work, nutrition and counseling- with special attention to family planning and prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV. I sat with a patient that came in for a screening test, and learned for the first time they were HIV positive and would need to take pills for the rest of their life in order to stay healthy. I treated young kids who had been infected in utero, and were going through the important process of learning about their status and what it means to be “positive.” I counseled patients on the right method of birth control for them, and the importance of

continuing to use condoms to protect their partners from being infected with HIV. I even had the opportunity to go with social works to patients homes, where we were able to talk to them more in-depth about their particular challenges to maintaining their health, attending appointments, and being adherent with their medications.

The clients I met on my rotation were kind, forthcoming, and patient with my limited Kiswahili and preliminary knowledge of HIV care. We shared intimate moments despite our very different cultural backgrounds, and I was continually thankful for their trust in me as a temporary provider in their HIV care. Many of them invited me into their homes, provided tea, and told me the stories of their lives. Each one of them had a unique story and hope for what lies ahead.





From day one, the providers I worked with welcomed me into their community. I learned an immense amount from them, not just about HIV management, but about managing the social, nutritional, and emotional issues of patients with HIV. After seeing a few patients together, we would often debrief and they would ask me if I had any questions or concerns. The longer I was on the rotation, the more comfortable they felt giving me the reins and overseeing me as I saw patients.

As part of my stay, I was asked to come up with a continuing medical education topic I could offer to the providers. The clinic was trying to increase the uptake of family planning amongst its clients and, since I have a passion for reproductive rights, I

thought it would be an ideal topic. Through lectures, I reviewed family planning myths, interactions of HIV drugs with certain birth control options, and the current use of family planning in Kenya. In addition, I developed some conversation guidelines and had the providers do role-plays that encouraged discussing family planning with emphasis on patient choice and preferences, as well as beginning the conversation with identifying patient goals for children. As I continued in the clinic, I saw providers applying the knowledge and tactics we had reviewed together and patients responding positively.

After six weeks, I prepared to return to the United States and finish my last few months of medical school. While I would love to say I'll return to Nairobi and see all the wonderful friends I've made, it's hard to say what directions life will take you and where you end up. Regardless what the future brings, the time I spent in Kenya was magnificent, and I hope other students will get as much from the experience as I did.



Tara Ness spent six weeks in Nairobi, Kenya at the Coptic Hope Center for Infectious Disease, a department of Coptic Hospital, which provides outpatient HIV care to men, women, and children. The rotation is sponsored through the University of Washington School of Medicine and organized by the Treatment, Research, and Expert Education (TREE) program.