

Global Health: Medicine in Eldoret Kenya



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In preparation for my time in Kenya, I attended numerous orientation sessions, learned a small amount about how to acclimate to the culture of Kenya, inside and outside of the hospital and the expectation of the MTRH hospital, however I soon learned that no amount of orientation in the US was sufficient enough to prepare me for these 2 months. This rotation gave me access to the ins and outs of healthcare in Kenya and I cannot honestly say I realized the importance and utility of health insurance before rotating outside of the US.

My patient in bed 12. My first day on the pediatric wards here in Kenya, during the tour of the hospital, a nurse rushed into the hallway grabbing medical equipment for vital signs and syringes for medications. She was calling for a doctor, which meant my team. We students, along with the pediatric team leader hurried into the ward to find a small child struggling to breathe with very faint pulses. Within seconds we were performing CPR, pushing epinephrine, and taking turns trying to feel a pulse in the midst of the chaos. We looked over his blood gas results and saw that he was in metabolic acidosis with slight respiratory compensation and instinctively asked the nurse to contact the ICU. If this child was going to make it he needed to be incubated and mechanically ventilated, but they had no beds available. 26 minutes, 10 rounds of cpr, and 2 pushes of epinephrine and atropine later. Time of death was called at 4:16pm. Cause of death was pneumonia. He was 11months old. He was loved but he was poor. It helped me a lot during this time, to remember that I was a student of medicine and that I had not come to Kenya to “fix” things, rather I was there to observe and help as much as I could with the little information that I’d acquired over the course of my medical education. I realized very quickly some of the extent of the healthcare disparity in Kenya as compared to the United States and this was certainly a very eye opening experience on just my first day.

I’d heard stories about the rich culture of community in Kenya from classmates that had rotated before me but the stories didn’t do it justice! During this time I observed patients that had never met before their children or loved ones became ill, take up the responsibility of caring for another’s child or family member. Moms who’s children were transferred from general wards to sub specialty wards would often come back and visit the other children that they had looked after or the other mothers who had become fast family. They laughed together, cried together and celebrated together. It was no rare occurrence to come to the hospital in the evening and to see multiple different families huddled around a small cellphone screen watching a show online, laughing together. No matter how the day had gone, it was these instances that showed how much love and community meant to the Kenyan people and it always brought joy to my heart. Kenya recharged me.

It was a privilege to take care of patients at Shoe for Africa and MTRH, but an even bigger one to have the opportunity to observe the culture. Healthcare in Kenya showed me that it truly does take a village. We healed bodies, but the community within the walls of the hospitals healed and maintained souls. No one was ever truly alone, even the patients that didn’t have biological family still had others helping collect meals, administer medications, and to help them bathe. I learned to respect death and began to see the dignity in declining extraordinary measures. This experience has changed my life in ways that I never would have imagined and I am so grateful for the lessons that I’ve learned. I gained knowledge, self awareness, resilience, a sense of adventure and an even larger capacity to love and understand those different from myself. Throughout my 3rd and 4th years of medical school I often found myself asking residents “when exactly will I learn how to be a doctor?” This experience threw

me into the literal and figurative fire of team work, problem solving, and decision making, Kenya reassured me that I'm ready for the next stop on my journey in medicine.