

Child Family Health International

For my internship experience I made the decision to go abroad. During my time at Oregon State University I had a desire to study abroad, but it was too much of a challenge to incorporate my studies with an international experience. Luckily for me I researched IE3 Global Internships and found that there were opportunities. I decided on South Africa due to a recommendation from a friend, as well as because I preferred to go to an English speaking country and needed an internship which would allow me to gain practical health management experience.

Child Family Health International is a nonprofit organization based out of San Francisco, California which places students receiving higher education to gain practical internship experiences throughout the world. IE3 Global Internships at Oregon State University helped me to find organizations that were the best fit for my personal, professional, and academics needs. I choose to apply to Child Family Health International with IE3's help and was accepted.

My internship was twofold in nature. I spent the first five weeks in the city of Cape Town working in a large public hospital, Eerste River Hospital. The last five weeks I spent in Durban working at two semi-private hospitals, St. Mary's and McCord Hospital. Below you'll find a description of my experiences working in both cities as well as what I gained from my adventure abroad and advice I have for future students.

Weeks 1-5

Capetown, South Africa

Eerste River Hospital

Department of Finance

In Cape Town there were a group of 13 students with Child Family Health International. We all had different backgrounds and lived in different areas of the United States. Some of the areas of study for the students included Public Health, Pre-Med, and Nursing. The local coordinator, Marion Williams, and medical director, Avril Whate, were our main contact and a great help in our housing, travel, social and working experiences. On our first day we were given a tour of the hospital by Dr. Tyson Wessel, Chief Operating Office. Eerste River is a large public hospital which serves around 350,000 citizens of South Africa within the Tygerberg area of Cape Town. They are a secondary care hospital, meaning that a patient must have a referral in order to be seen at the hospital or else they would have to wait a very long time. The highest prevalence of disease within the hospital and country as a whole are tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS (MIV).

The hospital has many departments including Emergency Department, Kangaroo Department (pediatrics), Eye Clinic, ARV Clinic, Admissions/Reception, Outpatient Unit, Inpatient Department, Pharmacy, Theatre (operating room), Nursing Department, Human Resources Department, Administration Department, Finance Department, Supply Chain Management, Information Systems, Laundry, Catering, etc.

After the tour of the facility I sat down with the Chief Executive Officer of the hospital, Dr. Visser and we had a two hour meeting getting to know each other by discussing each others backgrounds and the expectations we have for one another

during the next five weeks. Dr. Visser studied at Harvard and teaches at the University of Cape Town and in the Netherlands. Dr. Wessel and Dr. Visser are both physicians who act as a team and run Eerste River Hospital. I told him that I would appreciate a project that I could work on and leave the hospital (or at least start). Dr. Visser said that he expected me to be proactive, ask lots of questions, and stick to one department so I would really understand how that department works instead of just casually touring different departments the entire month. He wanted me to grasp a true understanding of how a department worked and feel as though I was a member of the team.

Based on my interests we decided that I would spend my time working in the Finance Department. I spent my time looking at the amount of energy the hospital consumes in terms of electricity and water and analyzing trends over 2+ years in order to determine what feasible steps could be taken in order to reduce costs and reduce the hospital's impact on the environment.

I was very excited about this project in the beginning. It was a great relief because the months leading up to my internship I really wasn't sure what I would be spending my time doing. A challenge that I did not expect was how difficult it would be to try to undertake such a huge task in a public hospital where the system is incredibly fragmented and resources were so scarce. Something I enjoyed doing was getting to know my colleagues. They all have great pride and enjoyment in their work. All of them are very efficient in what they do and are very knowledgeable. I was able to not only learn about how a hospital is operated, but I was also able to have the opportunity to become more culturally competent.

The employees working in the Finance Department of the hospital and all the rest of the staff were incredibly helpful and nice. I had to constantly remind myself that I'm here to observe a different culture and understand more about the issues affecting their society, but I was also there to work and make a difference within their organization. It was a challenging, yet fun and rewarding task.

Every week I also had the opportunity to sit in on important meetings where they discussed everything from the future rebuilding plans, employees rights and responsibilities workshops, vetting committee- where they determine what and how much to buy (from expensive medical equipment to bandages), and a weekly meeting with the nurses unions and top management meetings discussing ongoing issues affecting the organization.

I was able to make good progress with my project. I collected all of the data on how much energy has been used by the hospital and how much it has cost over a two year period. I then met with engineers and got information and data about installing solar panels to the building. It is a large upfront cost that the hospital cannot fully implement yet but it is going to take place in the near future. Although it was disappointing that the hospital will not "go green" right away, it was clear that over the 5 weeks I was there employee's awareness of the issue was dramatically raised. Also, another health administration student came to do an internship right before I left and I was able to mentor the student and wants to continue work on the project.

Weeks 6-10
Durban, South Africa

For two and a half weeks I worked at St. Mary's Hospital in Durban. St. Mary's is a private hospital because they receiving funding through grants and donations, however, anyone is able to seek treatment. The vast majority of the patients that come to the hospital seek treatment for HIV. I was placed within the health information systems department and was tasked with attempting to look at some of the issues that they have with tracking patients in their system.

The hospital has lots of issues with making sure that their patients come back at the right time in order to get new medications in a timely matter.

Through this experience I met with the top management of the hospital and we identified ways within the system that they could do a better job of following up with patients. This included getting all the necessary documentation from patients such as address, phone number, and medical histories. It was then decided that there would be an additional switchboard operator hired who would call patients reminding them of their need to seek treatment. For patients who did not have phone's it was decided that a mailer would be sent to them. It was still pending when I left the hospital how patients who had no address would be contacted, but it was a fairly small percentage of the individuals in need of the hospital's services.

My last two and a half weeks were spent at McCord Hospital. McCord is a private hospital, meaning in this sense that patients must pay in order to receive any sort of treatment. I worked with Dr. Manni, who is the Chief Medical Officer at the hospital. In this setting I was able to job shadow and learn a lot about the medical side of health

administration, mostly it involved dealing with staffing and equipment needs. Through this experience I was able to visit an orphanage, hospice, and small clinic. Being exposed to these areas of health care was a great learning opportunity and was truly invaluable. My project at McCord was to essentially set up a health management internship program. They had never had an intern doing health administration specifically so it was an opportunity for me to speak and learn from staff while attempting to create a new program. We wanted to create a program that could be easily implemented with the resources the hospital currently has and advertise the program specifically for future students studying public health and health management. McCord was a great way to wrap up my internship and time abroad.

Closure

Before my internship I tried my best to research the historical, cultural and health system of South Africa but not as much as I would have like to. I was so anxious about my first international experience and making sure I was set to go that I didn't have a lot of time to do a ton of in-depth research to full grasp the world I'd be walking into. The best advice I received when planning my trip was to "just go" from my dad. It's okay to be unsure of yourself and wonder if you can handle being gone for so long away from your comfortable, familiar life. It is a bit scary, but "just go".

Once you get to South Africa there will be an adjustment period, whatever that looks like for you. The group typically starts out pretty quiet and tired. It took me about a week to really get comfortable with the group of students and consider them close

friends. It took about a week to get used to living in a new home and not having all the amenities I often relied on. After the adjustment period I relaxed and had a great time.

Something that helped was to remember that this is all so temporary. It seems like a long time but it will go by in the blink of an eye. Enjoy it and keep in mind that this is your experience.

While you are here you can't control much, but you can control your outlook. Students are here to observe and learn. You'll learn a ton and be overwhelmed with information at times, but that is part of the experience. Take the time to process, think, and journal. Rely on the coordinators and fellow students because they will always be your best resources. Most importantly take the time to laugh and not take yourself too seriously—this is the time of your life!