

## CFHI report: Cape Town, South Africa (July 2008)

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### **Clinical expectations:**

As a non medical student, I realised that I would not have the same opportunities as would the medical students – and fairly so. Given this, my mindset going into the program was to gain a better understanding of the challenges of the health care system in South Africa, which stem from the previous Apartheid regime. I wanted to learn how public hospitals manage with limited resources and how they deal with their most prevalent medical conditions. In addition, I wanted to find out for myself if the underprivileged has rightful access to basic health care.

I can say that these expectations have been met and much more. I believe it is very important that the students spend a day in a private and a public hospital in order to see the stark contrast between the two. In doing so, I was able to gain a better understanding of the residual effects that Apartheid has imprinted on the health care system. Moreover, it was a chance to reflect on things. I, for one, noted that whereas the private hospital is well funded and has the top medical staff and technology, the dedication and empathy of the people at the public hospital is unparalleled.

I also appreciated the opportunity to follow a mobile clinic into some of the poorer areas of the city. It was interesting to learn about one of the ways the South African system reaches out to those in need of basic care but, do not have the means to access it on their own.

My time in the ARV clinic at Eerste River Hospital was yet another highlight. Dr. Mouton and Dr. MacKenzie (intern from Scotland) were both very helpful and took the time to incorporate us in their daily activities. In fact, we had a chance to take down patient histories, which is something I've never had the opportunity to do before. It was my first time working with HIV/AIDS patients and I certainly learnt a lot about the sophistication and social consequences of the disease.

Attending Dr. Welzel's and Dr. Visser's lectures on Friday mornings was very educational and something I highly recommend to future students. They were both very engaging speakers who provided great insight into current medical issues that the hospital was experiencing and those that are relevant to South Africa in general.

**Worries/anxieties before coming:**

I didn't have many worries or anxieties prior to leaving Toronto other than how safe we would be as a group. About a week before I left, there were reports of heightened Xenophobia attacks in some townships in and around the Johannesburg area and this caused reason for alarm. However, Marion's correspondence via e-mail certainly helped reassure me that there was nothing to worry about.

**Homestay experience:**

I had a great time with the Lodewyk family. From the very first day they welcomed me with open arms. I felt as if I had known them for years. They would always ask whether I was comfortable in their home and made an effort to incorporate me in their social activities. I have nothing but the highest regard for them.

My advice to future students would be to adapt as much as possible to the family you will be staying with. There may be times that you question how they do things or why they take issue to something you may have done, but remember to always take a step back and think about the implications of their culture and other factors influencing their actions. It is always worth communicating with your homestay family by spending time with them and being respectful of their expectations and needs.

**Leisure activity experience:**

I thought this aspect of the program was also well coordinated. The Township and Garden route tours were both inspiring and breath-taking. This was our chance to get a taste of the vast beauty of Cape Town and its surrounding areas. I was happy to tour these places as a group because it let us get acquainted with one another before starting our clinical rotations.

**Overall Impression/Recommendations:**

I thought that the Cape Town CFHI program was very well organised and I am very glad to have been a part of it. A nice balance between work and leisure activities was met that made my experience one to remember for a life time. The amount of dedication and hard work that both you (Avril) and Marion have put into this program is clearly evident and you should both be

commended for your efforts. There really isn't much I would change, except that it would be great if the pre-meds could have one day to visit GF Jooste Hospital to have some exposure to the emergency/trauma patients they receive. I understand the logistics to create this opportunity may be complicated, but if it at all could be worked out, I think this would complete the clinical experience.

Thank you again for everything!