

CFHI Global Health Education Program
Introduction to Traditional Medicine
Dehra Dun, Patti, & Rishikesh, India
By Donald Wayne Long II, CHI Participant, June 2011

My name is Donald Wayne Long II, but everyone knows me simply as DJ. In June of 2011, I participated in Child Family Health International's (CFHI) Introduction to Traditional Medicine which took place within Northern India. Receiving the scholarship was so surprising to me because my thoughts were that the interest in the non-traditional medical student was diminutive. To be honest, before the scholarship, I had my doubts about moving forward as a medical student: I started school much later than most and the daunting time ahead of me can sometimes leave me frozen in fear. My family has been plagued with financial problems for as long as I can remember; where most brag about receiving a vehicle on their 16th birthday, I was happy to even have my family come together and for my gift of a silver dollar. The receipt of this scholarship has vanquished most of my self-doubt and fears and has given me the courage to continue along with the course ahead of me, and to become a physician who cares for people of all social backgrounds with little care given to the monetary reimbursement I will gain.

The moment that truly reinforced this love of medicine for me was sitting in the City Heart Medical Center owned and operated by Dr. Sanjay Gandhi. A very poor patient was being seen for chest



pain and Dr. Sanjay Gandhi ordered an ECG. The results showed nothing that was of concern. Listening to the breathing sounds did reveal that there was some obstructive wheezing so a prescription was written for the patient. Although in tattered clothes, the woman reached into a shirt pocket and placed some money on Dr. Gandhi's desk. The doctor immediately took the money and placed it back in the woman's hand. A small argument in Hindi ensued for half a minute and the woman

left clutching the rupees in her hand. She did not cry but a few tears of gratitude slid down her worn skin. Dr. Gandhi's service to his community went beyond his medical expertise; instead he gave of himself to take care of those underserved in his area.

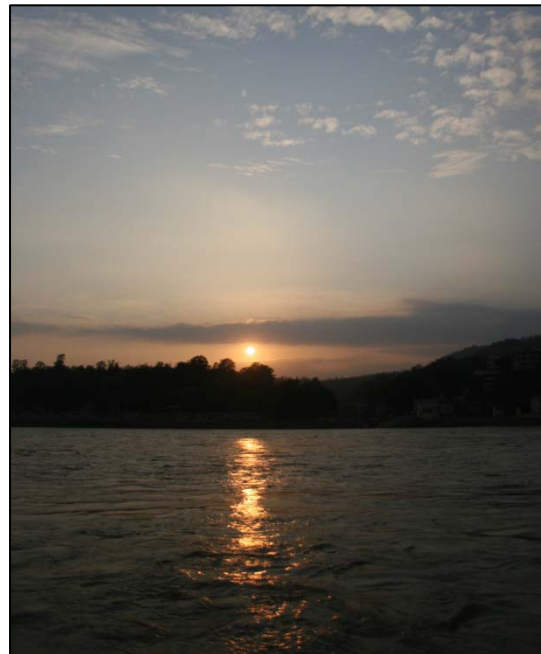
I thought about the woman on my ride home in the rickshaw. This lesson was part of my daily life in India, whether I was in Dehra Dun, Patti or Rishikesh, I didn't want to miss a moment with the doctors because of the wisdom they would bestow upon me on a daily basis.

In Dehra Dun I would wake up to a breakfast prepared by my home stay mother Mrs. Sethi and would have to be to Dr. Inderjeet Nanda's clinic for homeopathy by 11:00 AM. My interest in his traditions meant I never left on time at 1:00 PM. After my meeting with Dr. Nanda, I would ride with him to the chowk down the road and either walk or hop a ride on a bus back for lunch. At 4:00 PM I would

meet with Dr. Prem Nath in his dining room. For my first week I would receive a lecture on the theory behind ayurveda and for my second week we delved into acupressure and acupuncture. I would leave Dr. Nath at 5:00 PM and have to catch a ride from an auto-rickshaw to the other side of town to meet with Dr. Sanjay Gandhi and take part in the clinical assessment of patients coming into the clinic and walk through the 35 bed hospital for rounds. I would come home to a warm meal prepared by the home stay mother. Dehra Dun had many shops to explore and a wonderful “downtown” area near the old clock tower. Walking the streets of Dehra Dun really felt like I was home.

Patti had a different feel and a different schedule I would follow. We rode up into the mountain village in an SUV with Dr. Paul and the yoga instructor Akki. The first night we arrived the other participants and I were taken up a hill to watch the sunset over the mountains. Looking back at the village it was one of the most peaceful scenes I have ever seen. The next morning we woke up early for our daily morning yoga and Akki would work well to teach us, and give us quite a work out. Then we had a breakfast prepared by our friend Ringo and ate along side of Dr. Paul, Akki, Ringo and the pharmacist Varinder. Then on Monday and Wednesday we would work clinic hours, have lunch and tea, and then have an afternoon yoga lesson. Dinner was then provided and as the sun went down we would sit outside around the table and talk while enjoying the show of lizards hunting moths on the wall with a light. On Tuesday and Thursday we did not have clinic in town but would hike to other villages. With a backpack full of medicine we set up in two other villages and ran clinics for them. The hike was along an old dirt road but was beautiful with pink and orange flowers all over the landscape. Friday found us in a hike identifying medicinal plants that we had heard about during clinic hours all week.

From Patti I traveled to Rishikesh. To get to the ashram where I stayed, Mayank bought us boat tickets to get across the Ganges. There is also a suspension foot bridge that was very crowded most of the day. The mornings of Rishikesh found me with more yoga and a very healthy breakfast prepared by the cooks of the ashram. A lecture from Dr. Muthu Murugan about naturopathy would keep me busy during the mid day; in the evening, I attended a meditation hour. Every night the ashram had a ceremony for the river Ganges and many people would come to witness it. The sunsets in Rishikesh were a beautiful way to close each day.



The whole experience helped to develop the image of myself as a healthcare professional. I see so many individuals who seek healthcare as a profession because of the money that is usually associated with it; even in India there were those individuals or frauds who were using healthcare for personal gain. This trip reaffirmed my belief that the medical field it is not about making a huge profit; rather, it is about serving those in your community. The doctors I served with were very caring and gave beyond what we

would see a normal physician doing. Shadowing a physician during rounds in another country led to a definite improvement in how I will interact with patients and family at the bed side. Walking through City Heart Center and observing Dr. Gandhi with his patients through the ICU was very different than being in the ICU at my local hospital, especially watching the interaction of physicians with patients. In the United States treatment seems to have taken the place of caring for patients with more than a few physicians. Too many times I have seen a doctor enter a room and treat a piece of meat rather than a human. On occasion the hectic day of making rounds gets in the way, and sometimes we seem to stick strictly to the science and forget about the soul; however, at the City Heart Center, I watched as medicine was used along with a caring heart and an open ear. The gratitude that the patients and their families expressed showed how important it is to care for, not just treat, patients.

In the rural villages, humility was ever present with Dr. Paul. The majority of the people served through CFHI's clinic where Dr. Paul works, have no money what-so-ever and live day to day by working their land. The adults are so busy with their fields that many times the children are brought in to the clinic by other children in the family. We saw our share of scrapes and bruises, and also worked with patients who were suffering from diabetes or hyper tension. The work in the village was not glamorous, but was essential to over a thousand villagers in the area. Dr. Paul informed us that after obtaining a



medical license, a physician must spend a minimum of 5 years in a rural area. Many of the physicians end up not serving these communities. After roughly a year, a hand full of these physicians will either claim sickness or pay bribes to officials to enter bigger cities in order to increase their income substantially. Some communities don't even have physician support, but due to government outreach, they end up with a pharmacist or a nurse who cannot provide the same level of care. Dr. Paul has stayed in the rural villages for many years caring for those who are in

poverty. Having the chance to observe Dr. Paul's work and the depth of his care for these people has influenced me to such a degree that I will take this with me forever. Instead of looking for the larger establishment and seeking monetary gain, I will seek out those who are in need of health care and do my best to provide for every person I have the opportunity to serve. Serving is the most important part of being a good physician and making a difference in the world.

The experience with the physicians in India nurtured my knowledge as well as fostered my individual growth. I hadn't expected to come home with a list of herbal medications to study, yet in the third section of my binder sits almost a hundred medicinal plants with instructions for preparation and use. I am ecstatic to have had the opportunity to have learned this. As disasters happen, I hope to be on the front line helping those who are in need of medical attention; however, since supplies are always so hard to come by during large scale disasters, I know now that options are available that I could use to supplement care to the benefit of the patient. Now that I have an idea of what flora to look for and how to

prepare medications from them when synthetic drugs run out, I will be able to help more people without having to wait for supplies which could be on the other side of an ocean.

Caring for patients involves more than just medication; I must have an open mind of their beliefs. Holistic health was a key component of care for every physician I worked with. In Parmarth ashram, many patients were being treated with diet and exercise specific for their ailments along with an herbal



medication. The diets, which I also was able to experience, were some of the most nutrient dense meals one could have. Everything was taken into account and even I felt better after eating such a healthy diet for a week. Yoga was a daily exercise that focused on improving both the body and mind. Massage was also used for treatment along with water, mud or steam baths. These treatments may seem like a spa get away, but the patients here were serious about curing their illnesses and becoming healthy. Being able

to provide understanding to patients and having them follow a proper diet and exercise routine can be difficult, but I saw how much of a difference it was making in these patients' lives. Expressing this later while working out of a disaster situation will greatly benefit my patients in the future.

Tying together the knowledge of traditional herbal remedies with the science of western medicine has always been a goal in my life. The ability to give patients more medical options that may be accepted by them according to their belief system is a great advantage in the ever more globalized world. The knowledge of the medicinal plants that cultures use will also allow me to find possible drug interactions early and choose a different course of action which could save patient lives. My ultimate goal now is to be able to travel to underserved communities and provide the best health care I can for them; while at the same time, learning of their cultural traditions with medicine and possibly assimilating it into my own practice. Since the definition of health varies from culture to culture, the more I learn of each cultural practice, the greater number of people I can serve globally.

As globalization expands, the world becomes smaller so that our actions touch many more people. Underserved communities exist in every corner of the world. The poverty line here in the United States is so high compared to some of the people around the world. Never having traveled outside of the country, I saw people living in conditions that I couldn't have imagined before. The health of these people is only one of many daily battles these people must fight to survive. If we consider ourselves a caring people, then it is our responsibility— not a rich benefactor, not a corporation, not even a government— but our responsibility as physicians to help everyone we are able to reach. Seeing the doctors care for the underserved community gave me hope for our future around the world. As physicians we must work together and beyond the borders of our home city, state or country to make healthcare available for all. The responsibility lies in the hands of those who are able, and as future physicians, we will be able to help so many. In fact, we are obliged to improve our global community through our actions. We shouldn't seek

monetary gain as the only purpose of our careers; our job is to stand up and change the world. As physicians, we will no longer be the unreachable assistants to the rich but, instead, be the humble servants that the world needs now.

