



## Caught Up in Cape Town

By Jennifer Lund | March 13, 2012

I knew that I would find myself saying this but I really can't believe that I have been in South Africa for seven weeks now. The time is flying by! I was in Durban for the first five weeks, a large port city on the eastern coast of South Africa, and now I am in Cape Town, a beautiful city on the southwestern coast of the country. Both of the cities are absolutely beautiful but feel like two different worlds! In each of these cities I have had a wonderful time working, exploring, getting to know the locals, and assimilating to local culture as best I can.



I am interning at various hospitals in South Africa. While in Durban I worked at two hospitals – King Edward and St. Mary's. King Edward is an academic secondary hospital associated with the University of Kwa Zulu-Natal. It was built 75 years ago and the latest renovation was done 20 years ago. Everything looks dated – definitely a far cry from the modern, sterile white hospitals I am used to in the United States but while it doesn't look the prettiest, they are actually renowned across the province for their quality pediatric care. While here I spent time with consultants and medical students on ward rounds, which was a great way to learn about all of the various ailments that the patients were facing. I had the opportunity to go to the nursery and observe how neonatal care is administered at King Edward. I was also able to spend a few days in the pediatric ARV (anti-retroviral) Clinic, where I observed the doctors discussing treatment plans with the patients. With about 40% of the population infected, the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal has the highest rate of HIV in South Africa, which has allowed me to learn a lot about HIV and all of the opportunistic infections that go along with it. I have now seen and heard the heartbreaking ways that this disease has affected the lives of so many people – financially, emotionally, and socially – and observed the impact that it has had on the society of South Africa. I am still trying to make sense of everything I have learned but it is overwhelming at times and definitely raises many questions, ones that I know will be difficult to answer, or may never be answered.



While in Durban I also worked at St. Mary's, a 200-bed, public, Catholic hospital. At St. Mary's I spent a lot of time in the Pediatric Burn Unit. I talked to the nurses and got each patient's history, learning that most of the burns were from boiling water or electrical fires. I have always had a hard time with burn victims and thought that this unit would be especially hard for me and while it was heartbreaking, it was so easy to look past the burns and let the bright, fun smiles of these children melt my heart! I also did Community Outreach where I went out with a volunteer from the

hospital and delivered food and supplies to eight different orphanages in the area. Another unique opportunity that I had at St. Mary's was going out on mobile HIV Clinics. I went with HIV Counselors into rural townships and tested people for HIV, gave them treatment, and offered pre- and post- test counseling.

Currently I am in Cape Town, working at G.F. Jooste, a public secondary hospital in the poor suburb of Manenberg. Jooste is known as the roughest hospital in Cape Flats because some of the world's most violent gangs reside in the surrounding areas, making for a very busy casualty ward with uniquely interesting trauma cases. So far I have spent my time here observing in Casualty and the Operating Room, taking in as much as I can about how they do things here. I have worked in the Orthopedic Clinic learning how to put on casts, cut off casts, remove stitches and staples, and clean and dress wounds. I have also worked in the Infectious Diseases Clinic where I get to work alongside a doctor meeting with patients regarding their illnesses, the vast majority of which are HIV or Tuberculosis. I've spent a few days with the HIV counselors, administering HIV tests and observing pre- and post-test counseling sessions. I have learned so much and have been able to get so much experience and exposure that I would have never been able to get in the United States.



In addition to all of the clinical experience I am getting, I am also learning a great deal about the history and culture of South Africa, the health care system in this country, and myself. I knew that this experience was going to change my life, I just wasn't aware of how quickly and drastically it would do so. I have met people, heard stories, and seen things that I will never forget. I have had my beliefs challenged and my priorities reorganized. I have had a great couple of months in South Africa and am excited to see what the last few weeks has in store!