



South African Healthcare

By Alex Crane | September 18, 2012

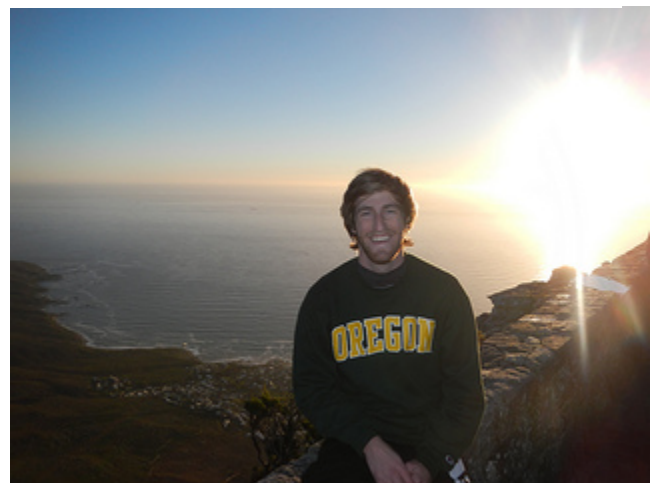
For the past six weeks I've been in South Africa shadowing doctors to learn about how healthcare is practiced and living with host families in different cities to gain a better understanding of the culture of South Africa. My internship has taken me from Durban (Eastern Cape), where I spent my first 5 weeks, to Cape Town (Western Cape), where I currently reside. The medical work that I have been doing has taken place mostly in government hospitals (where healthcare is free!!!) where I am able to shadow different specialties such as orthopedics, pediatrics, surgery, casualty (emergency medicine), and internal medicine. I

have also been able to travel to local government clinics that handle the density of patients and if unable, refer them to the hospitals. Each city has provided it's own excitement and variety of culture though, just like you would notice in the States from California to New York.



Let's start with Durban. When I first knew that I was coming to South Africa I had absolutely no idea where Durban was or even that it was a city in South Africa! But upon arriving I knew that it would go down in my top 10 places to be, mostly because it was about 75 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter! But it is a city of very rich African culture as the majority of its residents are either from India or traditional Zulu people. My host family was Zulu and very laid back. They were so happy to have students staying with them and would always engage us in conversation! Our host mother even cooked us all the local favorite foods! This included foods like curries and whole

cooked chickens, and even something called a "Bunny" (which is basically a curry inside of a quarter loaf of bread, the one food item you must buy if you ever visit Durban)! The hospital that I was interning at was a hospital called King Edward VIII. While in this hospital I shadowed doctors in the surgery and pediatric specialties. It was very interesting to see what they could treat with the minimal amount of equipment that they had on hand. Some procedures that would require doctors to perform in theater using surgery were actually performed in wards with



curtains drawn around the patient's bed (mostly due to keep cost low and a lack of equipment)! They had a very stern and professional attitude in most of the hospital, which was very helpful when learning about specific procedures and medical ailments, but could seem very cold at times.

Also while in Durban I visited a local clinic called "Blue Roof" which specialized specifically in HIV/AIDs treatment and prevention. I learned so much in the time I spent there from Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (which is a treatment for most HIV as long as it is caught within 72 hours of exposure to infected bodily fluids) to Anti-Retroviral Therapy, which contains the virus and decreases the immune suppression of our body. This is all made possible via "Keep a Child Alive Foundation" from the U.S., which helps fund all the ARVs and paying doctor/nurses salaries to keep fees at a minimum for the affected patients! It's wonderful to see that some foundations are working toward global healthcare rather than focusing solely on our nation.

After my 5 weeks in Durban, I flew off to Cape Town on the western coast! Immediately after getting off the plane I could sense a different vibe from the people! It was so much more relaxed and people seemed to "go with the flow" a lot more. And luckily enough this trend continued to my home-stay as well as to all the doctors in the hospital that I am currently working at known as Jooste (Jew-is-ta). All of the doctors seem to be so friendly and warm and they always are willing to help you understand something that you might have missed during rounds, even going back to the patients so you can take vitals again for some practical experience. We were even invited out to lunch by a doctor the other day just because he wanted to hang out with us some more and show us around the town a bit (mostly as to where all of the good places to eat were). This really caught me off guard because I had never encountered a situation like that before either in Durban, California, Oregon, or anywhere as a matter of fact! But it just seems as if that is a normal thing for professionals to do out here, which really made me feel at home and needless to say I'm excited for some authentic touring of Cape Town fast food!



Throughout the past 6 weeks that I have spent in South Africa I have noticed differences much like in the U.S. from coast to coast. Although I have only been in Cape Town for 2 weeks now and I am only just beginning to scratch the surface of what this town can offer up. I'm so thrilled to be having this experience and I'm so excited to still have another 4 weeks left to explore!