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CFHI Traditional Health and Child and Maternal Health rotations

IE3 CFHI India Exit Essay: A compilation of my adventure

My initial impression of everything India was pure excitement. I was soaking up the entire sensory overload that occurs when a person is submerged in a new place. I wasn't paying much attention to specific details about the program or work I would be doing... although everything India is everything CFHI. I knew what I was here to do professionally since I had done so much research pre-departure, but personally I was still trying to adjust to my new environment. It was not until day two that I began to get settled in and could focus on the program I would be apart of for the next ten weeks. As an American, and an individual that thrives on to-do lists and punctuality my first impressions of CFHI was the mix-ups of organization. IE3 was phenomenal with preparations but I was unsure of anything else India when I arrived. Instructions for duties were not given until the night before or the day of, and even then, details were not clear. Looking back, sometimes that's the way things were to be done; after ten weeks passing I grew to love the beautiful madness. Although this process was slightly taboo, simply put, I quickly got over this—after all it's Indian time. That's just how things are, and would be. It is kind of nice becoming accustomed to “going with the flow”, and sticking to an unregulated plan. This aspect would eventually lead me to have so much freedom within the program. I had the ability to move about the rotations at my liking.

Fast forwards, I had been in India for two weeks, and have had the time to really reflect on my experiences so far. At this point I have been learning about the many different types of holistic and alternative medicine. This has really expanded my horizons on what I initially considered important in healthcare. I have had the opportunity to work in the areas of homeopathy, Reiki, acupuncture, hydrotherapy, mud therapy, yoga therapy, color therapy, as well as the many other areas of naturopathy. These forms of healthcare are all new to me, but I am enjoying every lesson thus far.

As I continue my journey through India, my goals and expectations continually evolve. I expected the first 5 weeks to be outside of my element and so far it has been... but in the best way possible. I chose the Traditional Healthcare Rotations with the goal of exposing myself to new types of medicine; that goal has been accomplished, and it is only week two. I couldn't have made a better decision by choosing the alternative medicine rotation. I am learning skills that will one day conquer my ultimate goal, or even dream of opening my own all-in-one allopathic AND holistic medical facility. Another intern specializes in holistic medicine, and I specialize in allopathic medicine. I may have even met my future business partner.

My first official impression of India began in the New Delhi airport. I stepped off the plane and immediately felt like I was in a movie. The smells, the loudness the huddles of people, the heaps of garbage and the smog of a huge city stood out the most. On the cab

ride to Hema's house (program coordinator) that I had the first of many "I am in India" revelations.

Before I boarded the plane and left the states my biggest anxiety was the culture shock everyone warned me about. I purposely spoke and read so much about India that I felt comfortable saying I had prepared myself for the easiest transition possible. Although India is nothing like I thought it was going to be, in the end I feel like I was one of the lucky ones. I had a very easy time adjusting to India. I don't think it was all due to the hours of preparation I did, but just because of my newfound qualities of extreme optimism and open-mindedness. I continually tried to maintain those qualities, and it worked tremendously all ten weeks. I am proud of myself for adapting so well. Being independent even 8000 miles away from home is a *really* good feeling.

By week 3: if anyone who hasn't been to India were to ask me to describe it I would say, it is near impossible. You can't paint an accurate, complete picture of India without experiencing it for yourself.

I have seen so much of the country already, and any anxiety I had before, is gone... I think.

Seventeen days in and I have already been to 5 cities. I have much more ground to cover, and I can't wait for what lies ahead.

Eight thousand miles away from home, I find myself still as joyful as I was the day I arrived in India. In the beginning I had such an easy time adjusting I was apprehensive I would fall victim of the mid-internship 'hump'. Still lucky-- so far so good. The realization that I adjusted so well aligns with nearly all of the goals I set for myself before my departure, In my opinion I have advanced toward exceeding the expectations I set for myself, professionally, personally and cross-culturally... and my internship is only half over.

The majority of my professional goals surrounded being open and aware of how different the Indian healthcare system differs from America. Professionally I came to India to expand my previous knowledge of medicine in clinical, practical and even hypothetical situations. My goal was soak in as much knowledge as possible so I could return home with multiple new experiences to reflect upon and apply in my own clinical practice one day. Thus far, one of the most impactful pieces of my journey has been my clinical rotation with Dr. Gandhi; he has done what I hope to do in the foreseeable future. He is also the type of person I was hoping to find on my internship abroad in India. In the week I spent with him we discussed my personal and professional future. He shared his personal struggles and triumphs he had encountered and overcome in his life; all of which made him a better person while simultaneously giving him the fuel he needed to continue the path of becoming a doctor. Now, at 37 he owns a successful practice that is built on the same values it started on. What is most exciting is the way he manages his practice; it parallels my thoughts of what makes a medical facility successful. He very well may be the most impactful mentor in my professional life.

On the second half of my internship I want to keep trudging forward into unknown territory-- both literally and figuratively. Now that I feel comfortable, and at ease in India, I feel as though I can only gain more knowledge with every situation I am submersed into.

Like I mentioned previously, personally I feel I have excelled and am on my way to completing all of the goals I originally set for myself. While it is true I came to India to learn things about medicine and healthcare more importantly I wanted to learn about myself. Five weeks in I feel as though I have done that. The first half of my internship I learned that I am a very patient person, who seems to find optimism in just about any circumstance or situation. As the second half of the internship progresses and beings I am by myself I am learning that I am a very self-sufficient person. I never knew the extent of my independence. It is a very comforting feeling that I am in a different country, with little previous language experience maneuvering about the city fairly complication free. Everyday I find myself feeling that I conquered the world, even if all I am just crossing the street in the most traffic dense area in all of India. Personally I came on a ten-week adventure to build upon myself, and my career while simultaneously traveling the world. So far I couldn't be happier with my experiences. Before I leave I want to make a point to all of the individuals in India who have helped me along the way know my sincere gratitude for making my experience so amazing.

Everyday I make progress toward being a more rounded person who now has massive exposure to a culture so entirely different than my own. Coming to India has given me the ability to communicate without using words because the language in each area is completely foreign to me. I have learned the art of maneuvering around a city, which I have never been to. Everyday my senses are on over drive. Along my journey through India I have done my best to take mental pictures and take into account each and every experience viable. It has proved hard to do, but extremely worth the trouble.

I came to India for several different reasons, some I have mentioned above, but culturally specific, I came to be a world traveler at 23 years old.

The language barrier the second half of my internship has proved more difficult than the first 5 weeks. I picked up Hindi, and was feeling fairly comfortable with the dialect. Then, I was uprooted from northern India and brought to Pune where the mother tongue is Marathi; most people can barely speak Hindi, more or less English. However, if I take this with a grain of salt it can be viewed as a huge learning experience; since everyday is a struggle, when the sun set it means another triumph and another accomplishment. I am proud to have been given the opportunity to come on this internship professionally culturally and most notable personally. I am becoming a better person than I was when I departed on October 1<sup>st</sup>. I plan to take advantage of each and every day for the continued duration of my stay.

I wouldn't have it any other way

Giving the answer to what an intern's normal day in India is like proves more difficult than easy. Not only does the day differ day-to-day and week-to-week, it is noteworthy to

add that the first half of the internship compared to the last half are also entirely different. The first 5 weeks in the Alternative medicine rotations were in general very similar. Each week I was assigned to work with different healthcare professionals or holistic gurus. We would change locations once a week, and follow a tentative schedule Monday-Friday. The format was written on paper and we were aware of our duties after a couple of days. Therefore a normal day would start around 8 or 9 AM and end sometime between 1-3 PM. Everyday brought new knowledge and added pages of notes to my journal. In Pune however the schedule is a little bit different. The schedule is based entirely on your preferences. Mr. and Mrs. Dabak provide you with 1 or 2 hospitals each week that you can attend at your liking. If your preference changes or develops into something new, it is not a big problem to anyone. A day begins at 8-9 AM followed by breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Dabak. It is a useful time to reflect upon your weekly experiences, after that it is off to work till about 1-3 PM. Since the Child and Maternal Health program focuses primarily on Allopathic medicine, duties usually include time in the operating and birthing rooms as well as the OPD (out patient discharge). OPD is the abbreviation for a clinic you go to for check-ups, strep tests, colds, coughs, and other common ailing complaints. Since clinic doesn't take up your whole day the rest of the day you are free to do as you wish. Explore, shop, go to a cyber café and check emails and update blogs... recreation time. You can walk around, spend time chatting over tea, or even take a nap if you see fit! I haven't found any trouble in finding balance between work and leisurely activities, especially on the weekends. The day provides many hours of fun, and since work only includes Monday-Friday, the weekend you can get your fill of adventure. You have the time off to explore surrounding areas and sightsee. You can visit the Taj Mahal, rock carvings, golden temple, and the Buddhist sanctuaries, Bombay, Goa... you name it, personal independence, it is exhilarating. If it is within traveling distance you can make journeys every weekend. My advice to future interns: I had the best time exploring on the weekends, be sure to see as much of India as you can.

Child family and Health International makes housing very, very easy. The internship arranges both your medical rotations, duties and work schedule. All you have to do is show up ready to work and enjoy the duration of your stay. Since I participated in the Dehradun Alternative medicine and Pune Child and maternal health rotations, both provide guest housing/family housing. In Dehradun you stay with a lovely married couple. You live and eat all of your meals with them. It is cozy and homey, and by the second night you will be calling it your home, guaranteed. In Pune, it is a similar situation, with a small twist. The coordinating doctor owns two homes. One he resides in, and the other is a guesthouse. Students from CFHI inhabit the 4-bedroom guesthouse the majority of the time and if it is not fully occupied sometimes he rents it out to other Indian students. It is your own personal apartment. A caretaker provides meals, and transportation, as well as the upkeep of the house. As for traveling on the weekends, housing is entirely up to your liking. If you would like to live in luxury for \$40-60 (2000-4000 rps.) a night you most certainly can. Or you can budget for only \$10-20 (500-1000 rps.) a night. I recommend doing both as it gives you a good perspective of the exchange rate and Indian accommodations. Splurging one weekend made me feel like I was living in luxury, it was fun to see how much 60 American dollars can get you. Two words, A LOT!

I applied for the Indian internship seven months before departure; therefore I had ample time to save up money. It made budgeting easier. Traveling to a foreign country for an extended period of time is expensive. India is no different except for the exchange rate being so favorable toward the American dollar. The plane ticket and program are expensive, but worth every penny. If you take the time to save up money, living on a budget is effortless. I found myself shocked at how much was still in my bank account as week 8 approached; even taking into account I took advantage of the many shopping and lodging conditions. I had to get a student loan for my experience, but my budget got me through this trip, and the 10 weeks just about perfectly. Traveling on a student budget is tough, but if you make the right preparations beforehand your trip will be more than enjoyable. Although I must admit, even without any spending money set aside for India, it would still be doable. People live in India everyday on as little as 100 rupees a day (\$2). If they can do it, so can you. I just wouldn't recommend it.

Traveling to and from work differs in every city and program. During my experience I have had a driver whom was employed by the program to take me and pick me up from work. Alternatively, I have also ridden public transportation every day. In some areas public transportation is crowded, but manageable. However I mustn't leave out my experience on an EXTREMELY crowded bus. This particular time had nothing to do with my work schedule, it occurred when I was traveling alone on one of the weekends. While looking back now, it is a funny story I will never forget; at the time it was a real damper on my mood. Therefore it is still worth noting. I consider myself someone who doesn't mind being shoved into small places with a bunch of people; after all, that is how India is at any given moment. I even came prepared for that detail, but in no way can you totally be prepared. However one experience wasn't that great, it was a 13-hour bus ride back home and I had bought the general seating ticket in hopes of saving some money. I recommend to ALL interns to only book first or second-class tickets. The general bus may be cheap (and may be fine for short travels) but during extended traveling--- SPEND THE EXTRA 200 RUPEES!!! Get on a 'luxury' bus, please.

You always have to keep an open mind while in India, things can be unpredictable sometimes, but that is the best part about it. You must always remember to stay optimistic, and take in everything around you. I have gained SO much perspective while in India, and the majority of that has been through my travels both on and off duty. Talk to your local coordinators about places to travel, how to get there and where to stay; they have a lot of experience sending students off on the weekend. They will undoubtedly be your best resource; the "Lonely Planet" books are also *sometimes* useful. That is how I got around, and every weekend was more amazing than the previous.

When I made the decision to come to India there was no turning back. I graduated with a human physiology bachelor's degree and was ready to continue my 'outside of the classroom' knowledge, AKA clinical work. Having prior coursework such as the applicable tissue injury and repair, biomechanics and physical therapy, exercise medicine, nutrition and anatomy helped me better understand the doctor patient conversations. I may have not been able to understand what they were saying in Hindi or Marathi, but the chart notes and documentation were easily understood. However even with my aforementioned

healthcare education, the detail that proved the most valuable in my internship was my prior exposure in the clinics themselves. Working in the emergency rooms, with doctors in private clinics, cadaver dissections as well as many other hands on volunteer observations of healthcare. Knowledge not available in the classroom was the most valuable. The combination of the two made my internship very successful.

Besides the challenge (and adventure) of getting lost in India with no possible communication with anyone, the biggest challenge was the language barriers when I most wanted to understand. I had prepared myself to not recognize side conversation and individual communication; it was only frustrating when I *really* wanted to be able to understand. For example when I knew there was a serious problem with a patient but the doctor couldn't take the time to thoroughly translate mid-conversation. All of the CFHI doctors were so helpful and understanding of the difficulties that come with language barriers. Nonetheless it was frustrating at times. All you can do is be patient and completely at ease with the trouble it may cause. It is a learning experience in itself to be put in a country with no previous language experience. It could have negatively impacted my internship, but I refused to let it have that effect. Approaching the adventure with optimism and hopefulness made everyday and good day.

If I had to deal with this scenario again, I wouldn't change it. All of the testimonials from CFHI alumni would recommend learning Hindi, but Hindi would only help you in Northern India. In Pune as well as all over southern India the mother tongue is Marathi. Learning the language would undoubtedly have been helpful, but in retrospect the difficulties provided a learning experience. Everyday was an adventure; every communication mishap was a story to tell. The most important thing about the internship was to explore another continent while simultaneously working in healthcare, which I have become so fond of.

Personal self-discovery was around every corner in the crowded streets of India. Waiting in traffic while the 1,000,000,000+ people and scooters crammed through the streets was both alarming and initially stressful. I felt lucky that I wasn't/ didn't go through a severe culture shock. It was helpful that I felt more like a sponge than a solid; I did my best to soak up everything around me, large or small. That was helpful and facilitated the awareness of my personality traits I had never recognized. Most notably patience, independence and continual optimism:

Patience: I didn't find myself getting aggravated with Indian time or the swarm of people in public areas. Even with traffic I found myself calm and collected. It was very fulfilling when I noticed my incredibly large tolerance for frustrating situations. This may even be a reason I approached the language barriers as an adventure and not an inconvenience.

Independence: for the first time I traveled to a different continent, 8000 miles away-- by myself. I explored on the weekend by myself, worked in the hospitals one-on-one by myself, built wonderful relationships by myself, and did it without too many hardships. It is very empowering.

Continual optimism: I never found myself upset at myself, or regretful for going to India. Everyday I woke up happy because I had a wonderful adventure ahead of me. It made my

experience so much better. Along the way I ran across pessimistic people, but it made me that much more proud to have a good outlook on life and any scenarios I was faced with. I found myself thinking *life is so wonderful* all the time. Besides the professional and personal triumphs I made in my ten-week adventure, the humbleness and positive outlook on life I gained couldn't have been achieved any other way.

I am so happy with my experience.

Going to India was one of the best decisions of my life. I will undoubtedly go back, and I am already looking forward to it.

Post India... three weeks later:

I have discovered so much more.

It has now been a month since I returned home. I have reread my blog, went through my multiple questions and emails I received when I was over seas, and while doing so I find myself in a constant state of remembrance. When describing my experience I find myself being very repetitive. In any normal essay that would be frowned upon, however when referring to India I couldn't write it any other way, I keep seeing all of the positive development I have made. The excitement of my adventure still runs through my veins, the people I met and the things I did still are reflected in everyday life. Everywhere I look I am reminded of India. Everything I do I find a piece of India. When I left the US to chase my dreams of studying abroad I didn't know what to expect, I didn't know exactly what the outcome would be. I knew things would be different, but I didn't know how. I love the United States and would never live anywhere else, but I definitely have newfound global perspective. What I mean by that is I can now say that the world is a lot bigger, and has a lot more to offer than just the stretch of land from California to New York. I have learned and experienced the true sincerity and compassion people are capable of. The extent of hospitality the Indian people cannot be surpassed, and I say that with 100% confidence. I come from a wonderful family, and have an amazing, supportive group of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances; before I left for India I considered myself a happy and very lucky person, but returning from India I feel as though my happiness and gratefulness for the life is even stronger (which I didn't think possible).

Everyone was so welcoming and warmhearted to me. Only once in 3 months did I have a negative occurrence, but since the words came from a complete stranger whom I would never see again, it almost doesn't count. My perspective on life has broadened so much, and I will say it again (this is the repetition I was referring to) I didn't think it was possible. I love my life more than I ever have. Not just because of my three-month stay in India, but because of the whole process. I expanded my career and professional network, made the definite decision to pursue medical school (as compared to a PA school), conquered an entire different continent and country all by myself and on my own, and I also overcame and adapted to cultural barriers so quickly I can be proud to say I acclimate to new things so well. The list can go on, but some things cannot be written on paper, but I know without a doubt I grew as a person.

Now with all the good stuff, lets talk about the bad, well not really bad—but... just keep

reading

The hardest part for me has been the reentry. Week one and two was easy, I was excited to be home, excited for Christmas, excited for family time, and excited to start the pursuance of my career. I told stories, amazed countless people with my pictures and experiences and had to opportunity to relive some of the time spent in India nearly everyday. But now that the novelty of my experience is slowly dwindling to other people I find myself lost in my thoughts about the nature of people. In any country, state, city or village you find optimistic, positive, negative, good, bad, sad, and all different sorts of people. I notice the selfishness and how naive people can be a lot more than I did before I left. I makes me sad when people complain about materialistic things, it makes me uncomfortable when people take things for granted, and I find myself not understanding how people can be so impatient and unaware of other people around them. I notice things I never noticed before...*HOWEVER*...while all the things I listed are negative, I also find myself noticing the positive, the good and the compassion in people.

With all the bad in the world (not just in US) spotting the *good* people is easy. Because of India I feel more of an impact from peoples actions and emotions than I ever did before. I can't pinpoint any specific event that facilitated this, so I must conclude it was just the encounter as a whole. I personally feel the necessity to thank people who are doing good or have positive attitudes; likewise I also feel the necessity of pointing out when someone is being uncompassionate, selfish, or complaining about things that don't really affect a humans quality of life. My advisor warned me that I would feel these emotions (thank you Eric), but since I adjusted so well to India, I thought it would be just as easy coming home. Getting into a routine and daily life was easy, it was as if I never left, school is easy, grocery shopping is easy (although the cereal Isle looks HUGE now!!!!), driving is easy, however the outlook on life and the attitude in my head has evolved to another level.

Sometimes I wish I could make someone understand why I am always so happy since my return, but no one can, at least nobody who hasn't experienced what I did. I wish I could just shake someone into believing their life isn't that bad, and that so many are people have it worse off, but I can't because they laugh it off only knowing nothing more that what they have lived in their own lives. When I first returned I would have said that the greatest reward I gained was my experiences with both people and in the clinics, I would have said conquering new lands made me feel so independent and sure of my capability in a tough or unusual situation. Now however I would say the biggest reward is my attitude towards life itself. The perspective I gained cannot be surpassed. Not only do I feel like a better human being, but I also hope that my optimism can be shared with other people. I hope that my positive attitude penetrates other individuals. A smile is contagious, and since I left India I am nothing but smiles!

India made me appreciate life, but it also made me a stronger person; personally, emotionally, and physically. I absolutely cannot forget the growth in my immune system; like I hoped my immune system is as strong as an ox! Drinking the water was totally worth it (although I don't recommend it for everyone). Shelane will not be getting sick for a very long time (cross your fingers for me)!



In the end...

If you had asked me a week ago I would have said:

Everyone told me India would change my life, but it didn't. It just made me appreciate it.

On the contrary in the last few days and while writing this reflection I have come to the

realization that I think it did more than that... I think India *did* change my life, maybe I

don't fully know how, and in what ways it did... I couldn't be happier about it.

Going to India was the best decision of my life, and I cannot wait to go back.