

Stephen Alexander, OSU, Summer 12

### ***Initial Impression...***

My initial impression of the organization as a whole was incredibly humbling. I was not 100% sure as to what exactly the Center for Social Medicine provided for the community and Pravara Medical Trust as a whole until the first two weeks progressed. I was shocked at the variance in communities served by the CSM such as sex workers, migrant workers and of course rural populations. Not only the communities served but also the entirety of services that are provided. The CSM primarily aids in connecting the people with the services provided by the PMT by educating peer educators within the community, in turn allowing for a greater number of people to be informed. The overall mindset of the CSM is to provide education and opportunity for healthcare to the rural people for free or little charge.

From these initial impressions my expectations were simply blown away. I imagined possible clinics to educate and a place where people could go to pick up pamphlets or referrals to appropriate aid, but I did not expect a comprehensive model that is currently in the works here. I pictured a model where people would have to go to the CSM for information and help, much like a model in the United States. Instead, the CSM actively goes into the community to make their services known, it is very impressive and really plays into the "Social" aspect of medicine.

Although this work is not in line with the goals I initially placed upon this internship, I have no quells. The reason this type of work does not necessarily play into the goals I set was because I was too focused on simply the medical aspect of medicine, the overall process of patient care and treatment. I am instead being exposed to a much more Public Health aspect of medicine which I originally did not consider. I had too narrow of a view in my goals in coming here and so far this internship has helped my realize a much bigger picture. I find that to be a very positive impact.

### ***Initial Arrival...***

I severely underestimated what it meant to be a foreigner in this rural part of India. Not only being a foreigner but also the polarization of cultures is all too apparent. Many of the Indian people stare intently for uncomfortable amounts of time, grab at my hand to try and shake it and often stand very close when in conversation. I knew about the difference in culture prior to arriving and it is not surprising but instead a daily incidence that is slowly becoming normal as time moves on.

### ***Greatest Anxiety...***

My greatest anxiety prior to departure hit me once I was dropped off at the airport. I am generally a very calm and steadfast person but once I was alone and waiting for the hours to pass prior to boarding the flight, it hit me that I literally forgot why I was doing this internship even though I had explained it innumerable amounts of times to my peers. I literally had no idea what I was walking into. I was hit with somewhat of an anxiety attack because I had failed to properly educate and inform myself on Indian culture and what it meant to be coming here for 3 months. I failed to prepare due to the insanity of the last term of college for me, I was busier than I have ever been in my college career and

always had India in the back of my mind but never found the time to prepare myself until I was in the airport, ready to depart.

Now that I am here, I would say that there was no preparing myself for all of this. I know that my “anxiety attack” was nothing serious because, here I am. I forgot for a brief moment that this is an adventure for me. Regardless of what happens, time passes and this is a learning experience, there is no losing in a situation like this.

### ***Settling in professionally...***

After the first few weeks of the internship everything has started to fall into place. In the beginning there were quite a few long days of getting through orientations and understanding the surrounding schools and PMT’s impact on them. It was difficult to make these experiences tangible to the professional goals that I had set. However, recently things have begun to take shape into a more clinical experience that I was looking for. Much of the last two weeks has been spent shadowing medical doctors and interns at the rural health clinics which has given me a basic understanding of how general check-ups go in the area. In a professional aspect I was stunned at the informality of the entire process of a patient getting a check-up. The patient needs no appointment, they only need to show up when they are sick and generally the relationship between the doctor and patient is incredibly informal, other patients may walk in during a check-up and ask questions. It serves as a huge contrast with the United States. I was surprised at first at this informal dynamic, but as time passed I have come to envy it. I believe it may lead to more open questions being asked of the doctors, in-turn enabling a greater understanding within the patient. In my experience, much of the way family medicine is practiced in the U.S. is quite formal where what the doctor says goes and generally not a lot of questioning. I feel professionally that I have gained a solid foundation into general family medicine and as time progresses here I would like to further explore specialties such as surgery, oncology and physiotherapy. These goals are underway as I have been working with Dr. Sunil to put together a plan for the coming month.

### ***Personal goals...***

Personally I believe I have made progress in my confidence to operate around campus and in the town without much difficulty. In the beginning it was unsettling due to staring and questioning but that has become assumed and does not bother me nearly as much. In regards to gaining personal connections here, I have been having difficulty making connections with other students here. Many are very nice and it is easy to start conversation with them but it is difficult to make a solid connection like I had hoped. In the same regards I feel as though I have made good connections with the advisors that accompany us out into the field. I plan on continuing to attempt to make connections where possible.

### ***Cross-cultural goals...***

Culturally I feel as though all my goals have been accomplished. It is difficult to go through an entire day here and not learn something new or to question assumptions that you may have. For example, I was somewhat accustomed to the area in Loni but taking a trip to Malegoan the whole

dynamic changes. The culture was much more Islamic based, social cues changed and a different dialect was spoken. This short trip acted to highlight the density of culture within India. Although I felt as though I was used to Loni and its cultural aspects it does not take much effort to find yourself in a totally different environment where you must re-asses your assumptions. I feel as though it is as much about learning about Loni per se as well as learning to check assumptions and try to minimize cultural faux pas whenever possible. With my time left here I would like to further understand each person's religion and try to understand their point of view of others whom may believe differently than themselves. Whether it causes grief, uneasiness or is simply not a problem. I would like to research this aspect further because as I progress through the internship it has become hugely apparent that religion is something that is taken incredibly seriously here and would like to further understand the dynamics behind it.

### ***Describe a day in your life...***

The work schedule around Loni is very consistent for us interns. Whether it is a day out at a rural clinic, lecture with Dr. Soma, school visit, or clinical observation at the hospital. The day generally revolves around arriving at your assigned location around 9 am. There is no need to be right on time because Indian people have no sharpness of time. Being on time is "weird" by local standards. You usually work until lunch which is around 12:30. After you eat your lunch at the mess hall you usually have a break until 2 where you are free to do whatever you like. Generally people use this break to study or take a nap. This break is also village wide though so many times shops will be closed during this time as people are taking their afternoon naps as well. The work day usually concludes at 5. After work I generally run some errands to the market to buy snacks or meet with the other interns to talk about the day.

Sometimes after the work day I just return to my room to shower and write home. I personally take a bit more time to myself here because that is how I cope with being in a different. Being with my own thoughts for a while in the evening allows me to balance everything out and breakdown the day in my personal viewpoint in contrast to the Indian custom.

Generally the evenings after work are very relaxed and free until dinner at the mess hall. It is difficult to balance work and exploration in the same day. By the time the day is over I am generally tired and do not have much drive to explore the village. It is also dark by about 8pm here so going off of campus is not highly recommended. Exploration is usually reserved for the weekends where we only work a half day Saturday and have Sunday off.

### ***Housing...***

We are all housed in the International Center. It is very comfortable with your own bathroom and two single beds pushed together which form a double wide single. There are no cooking facilities within your room other than an electric water kettle for boiling water. There is plenty of cabinet space for things you buy at the store and plenty of closet space for clothes, although I hardly brought enough clothes to fill even a fraction of the space provided. There is a pantry which has some evening hours with a microwave, stove and fridge in addition to the mini-fridge in your room. There is air conditioning in each

room and a fan. The students view the international center as the nicest hostel on the campus. The name international center is a bit misleading because as far as I can tell we interns are the only foreign people who reside here, the rest of the rooms are rented by local students.

### ***Finances...***

I have still been floating off of the \$180 I arrived here with six weeks ago. I have not spent much money on anything outside of snacks, traveling, and a few recreation sites. All of our food is provided from the mess hall and all errands you have to do are within walking distance. It is very easy to get by cheaply here and I have spent by far less than I imagined. You can get by here without spending money on food but it is easy to become sick of the mess food very quickly. It repeats weekly and you do not necessarily know what you are eating most of the time. I generally spend around 1000 rupees (~\$20) a week on snacks like crackers, nuts and fruit in order to keep myself sane. Eating at the local restaurant is very affordable as well and is a huge step up in quality of food. It is usually 500 to 600 rupees for 6 of us to eat our fill.

Renting a car is very cheap, about 7rupees/km. When renting a car for planned journeys contact the CSM, in particular Mahngesh as he will be happy to arrange one for you. Part of the reason everything has felt so inexpensive here is because as a group of 6 we generally split the cost of everything we share, further reducing individual cost. It is difficult to find recreation around the village, there is a curfew in place and I haven't confirmed it but I don't believe you can go outside the gates after dark which is about 8:30. I would recommend those who come here to purchase something like a Kindle so that they may buy books online and read at their leisure for recreation. Generally our group of interns in the evenings will have tea together and try to watch a movie or show one of us brought. Online streaming media services like Netflix, Hulu or Amazon Video do not work here so bring whatever entertainment you enjoy in hardcopy or already downloaded! As is Indian custom, days here are not meant to be filled with activities and rushing to do more and more in a given day. It is often about being at leisure with the world around you, it is a difficult concept to adopt.

### ***Travel and Transportation...***

As mentioned I generally walk anywhere that I need to go for errands or work if it is on campus. If we are ever assigned to go somewhere off of campus the CSM will arrange a car on our behalf. Generally we rent a SUV type vehicle whenever we go somewhere for recreation on the weekends. I am very happy with this choice as it is very cheap and convenient. There is no train station in Loni and I believe the nearest one is about 30km away. So renting a car is about the only choice! We save exploration for the weekends mostly as we are usually quite busy during the week and not much time is available for recreation outside of the PMT. The Ajanta and Ellora caves were a great experience however I would not recommend trying to see both in one day, it will total about 9-10 hours of driving and you'll have to rush through the caves which defeats the purpose. Going to see Ellora would be my highest recommendation it is both the closest and I thought the most beautiful. We also went to see Saibaba temple which was gorgeous but I would HIGHLY recommend going during the week and not the weekend when we chose to do. You will be overrun with people interested in you and it is quite distracting and incredibly packed

with people.

**How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?**

My coursework has prepared me only in a very broad sense for this internship. I have the ability to think critically about subjects presented by the CSM or in our hospital rotations so I am able to ask some insightful questions. My coursework dealing with anatomy and cultural anthropology have been the most relevant when in the hospital or going rural visits respectfully. Anatomy and physiology has allowed me to understand much of what is happening in surgeries and when a diagnosis is explained to me. However, much of the medical terminology I learned freshmen year needs some brushing up on. My anthropology classes helped give me a broad idea on how to conduct myself here. As mentioned in previous answers, checking assumptions and doing my best to accept the different perspectives presented to me. Overall, I would say my coursework has prepared me adequately for this internship. There are some areas where I am lacking but they have not left me in a situation where I was not able to continue learning.

**Cross Cultural: Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?**

When I was observing the Family Medicine department I was regularly called into Dr. Linge's office in order to have a discussion on an interesting medical case presented and his ideology on how it should be handled. In the middle of one of these discussions Dr. Linge said to me "I am now going to have a conversation with this man here." The man he was referencing had been present throughout the discussion but had not said anything. I replied "Ok." I continued to sit in my seat for a minute or two waiting for him to have his discussion with the other man, but they never started. It took me some time to realize that he was dismissing me for a few moments in order to have another discussion. I finally asked if I should leave and he confirmed.

As small of a situation as this was, it still continues to bug me because I feel as though I must have missed some non-verbal cue but I cannot place my finger on it. He had said it so nonchalantly and nicely that I thought he just needed a moment to talk in Marathi and did not want to seem rude. I believe I handled the situation properly in being frank and asking if I should leave because I do not think he would have directly asked me to excuse myself. After I had asked to leave, we both smiled in understanding that I had misunderstood his initial statement. In the future I would still be direct in asking what he would like me to do but ask in a more polite way such as: "Would you like me to wait outside until you are done?"

**Personal: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?**

I have learned that too often I get wrapped up in insignificant things. That I need to be more relaxed in

life and place my attention where my priorities lie. Taking a page from India's book, I find that the people here face so many challenges and go without so many things that I take for granted back home and yet the people here are still content because they choose to be. I have realized that our lives are more about our reaction to each situation than the situation itself. Even though this is the cliché materialistic American epiphany, it has really taken hold for me. At the end of the day I need to realize how important balance is to everyday life.

**Professional: With your experience thus far, are you more or less committed to a career in this field? What experiences have contributed to this?**

Starting this internship I knew I wanted to do something related to surgery or acute care in the future. With this past week I feel as though I have cemented my decision to pursue a career in orthopedic surgery. I was able to spend two days in the Orthopedic Operation Theatre and was absolutely blown away by how physical it all was. The surgery was a unilateral replacement of a woman's femoral head and the best way I can convey the experience was that it was the most unsophisticated surgery I have ever witnessed. It was all tangible to my coursework in anatomy and physiology because overall, I understood the necessity of each step in the procedure and could identify many of the landmarks in the body that needed to be taken into account. It was the first surgery I witnessed that made sense to me and did not need a resident to explain. Orthopedic surgeons are referred to as the "carpenters of surgery" and this title completely rang true in my experience.

I found that this surgery was tangible to my interests because more than anything I like to use my hands and often I assist my father in woodworking. At this moment this field appears to be a perfect bridge between my desire to work with my hands and have a career in the healthcare field. My main concern at the moment is the difference between orthopedic surgery in India and the US. I imagine they are quite similar but in other surgical fields I have witnessed many of the residents tell me the procedures they do here are ancient in comparison to the US.

I also spent a day in Casualty which would be the equivalent of Emergency Medicine back home and found that I did not enjoy my time there. It lacked a sense of follow through with the patient. For the most part the work included stabilization of the patient and then referral to the appropriate department to take it from there. I feel like the experience seemed impersonal overall and somewhat empty. This experience helped me realize that I have a desire for a personal connection in my work.

**Cross Cultural: Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed? What new sources of information have shaped your perspectives?**

From an outside perspective I associated India with a state of confusion and lethargy. Those associations still remain but to a greater understanding. It isn't so much confusion as it is a better understanding of the ebb and flow of how this part of the world works. If a lecture was supposed to start at 9am but instead begins at 10am it isn't because there was a breakdown in the chain of command it is simply when things came together and were able to begin. From a time critical standpoint which I'm

conditioned to follow I initially categorized this as confusion or laziness. It is about much more than that though, because often we stress about specifically starting at a certain time in the US that it takes up a disproportional amount of our attention, we in essence force things to happen, whereas here things happen when they will. It isn't that the people are lazy or confused it is just part of the culture and allowing things to take place when they will rather than cramming as much into a day as possible as we often do.

**Personal: What has been the greatest challenge personally thus far on this internship? What has been the greatest reward?**

My greatest challenge thus far has been adapting to the lifestyle required by the internship and area of Loni. I don't mean this in the way of Indian culture and living. Rather, it has been difficult with the amount of downtime in the evenings. We work throughout the day, often until 5pm and then we are free to do as we please but lack the freedom to go and explore or be active. The area of Loni is obviously rural in nature and we're for the most part limited to the campus itself for activity. For the first half of the internship this was difficult for me primarily because I went from one extreme of finishing up all my classes and working the evenings away. I was used to the go-go-go lifestyle back home and when that was contrast with the overall lax nature of the area I felt as though the days would last forever. For the first few weeks on the weekends we went to some of the tourist areas to try and fill this void of *needing* to do something but in the end it felt forced.

This is also where the greatest reward has come from. As I have mentioned in previous answers, the lifestyle here is about letting things occur as they please without need to force. As the second half of the internship comes to a close I have begun to realize the special kind of peace that arises from this mindset. Of course, I still desire to fill my time with activities but I have come to understand the balance that comes from having time to yourself. Often in the evenings I take time to read or write and simply be with my own thoughts. It is sort of an intangible feeling that is often not realized back home due to my focus needing to be on my work for the day or days to come.

### ***Accomplishments***

- 1. Confidently presented a workshop to the local schools.***
- 2. Identified surgery, specifically orthopedics as desired career field.***
- 3. Learning first-hand the importance of religion at the temple of Shridi SaiBaba.***

The greatest moment of personal growth at CSM occurred when we were asked to present a workshop on a "Health Promoting School" at two of the local schools. The workshop was required to take up most of the day and be presented to about 50 children grades 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> along with attending faculty such as the principle and teachers. I personally have attended very few workshops previously and quite honestly had no idea of the difference between a workshop and a lecture. When we were asked to perform this task it felt quite daunting.

The greatest challenge that I faced was not on the topic to be presented but rather how to perform a workshop confidently and appropriately. I was also familiar with how workshops are

presented in the United States, but would the format of informality and encouraged participation by the audience be appropriate for school settings where students call teachers “Sir” and “Miss” and never move from their seats throughout the day?

I decided that regardless if appropriate or not, when teaching something to children the best thing to do is be enthusiastic and confidence will follow. From what I had seen previously, these children severely lacked any form of excitement surrounding their education. The format of the workshop was not only appropriate but greatly desired. After it was all said and done, the workshop was one of the most memorable experiences that I took away from CSM. I believe that through being enthusiastic, I can inspire and at the very least give these children a day of entertaining education.

One of the most satisfying moments of the internship was the time that I was able to spend in the Operation Theatre. I finally had the opportunity to witness various surgeries for the first time in my life. I always had thought that I would like surgeries because through my coursework in anatomy I enjoyed working with the cadavers, but little did I know that surgery is nothing of the same sort. Cadavers generally don't start convulsing when a respiratory tube is inserted into their mouths as a patient does.

I was not mentally prepared for a lot of what I was going to see in my few days spent in the OR. Primarily the first day was the most difficult. The first surgery I witnessed sparked a lot of light-headedness and nausea even though it was very un-invasive. It caused me to question whether surgery would be a career I would actually like to pursue. After the first surgery I felt very sick and disappointed with myself for being sick at such a small surgery. Had all the work and travel I'd put in up until this point gone to waste?

Between the first and second surgery I had an awful lot of doubt in my mind as to if I actually belong here. I chose to go back into the surgery room where a man was having throat cancer removed along with a mandibular reconstruction. If the first surgery of a hernia made me ill, this was bound to knock me right out. I learned something incredibly important at that moment, that I cannot look at this surgery as if it is on a human being, it is a hands-on craft. From that point I realized why I had so much interest in the first place. This man needs this surgery to better his life. The blood, the smells and the sounds are part of the project. Looking at it from an anatomical standpoint rather than a person having half their face removed makes all the difference in the world. I remained for the 4 hour surgery with a renewed interest and confidence. Through the following days I found orthopedic surgery to be the field in which I had the most interest and knowledge anatomically. In hindsight, the cutting, hammering and soldering that made surgery the most difficult for me initially ended up being the part that made me realize it was the hands-on aspect of surgery that caused me to be interested initially.

### ***Host Organization Culture***

The best way that I can describe the host organization is very flexible and somewhat chaotic from an outside perspective. Once I realized and accepted this in contrast to my own personal structured and timely schedule it remained somewhat of a battle. On the outside I appeared very flexible and open to whatever day's work was coming but on the inside I desperately wanted to know what exactly was coming and how to plan for it. The only difficulties that came with this type of

workplace culture was that it was often difficult to prepare for the next day's proceedings so in the end you learn flexibility and for the most part bring anything that you think will be pertinent with you to have on hand and review when necessary.

Through my personal cultural lens it taught me some humility, I thought I was a flexible person here in the United States, but I was wrong. It was a firsthand lesson look at how India culture operates. The CSM catered to our needs quite well by providing a schedule of where we would be each day after the first two weeks but that still left a lot up in the air. Knowing I would be at a rural medical camp was good to know, but did not say what I would be doing there or how to prepare. Within the India culture it is best described as a tight rope walk between U.S. customs that we are conditioned to and the India culture of being lax. Overall, there is a consistent anxiety that is present throughout the days that will be reduced as the experience continues. You learn to let go of a rigid schedule and instead take the day as it comes and do your best to learn from whatever experiences are thrown your way.

### ***Advice for Upcoming Interns***

The greatest advice I can give is to realize you need to be able to let go of everything we are conditioned to. Truly take note of the differences taught during the pre-departure orientation. I myself did not take the orientation too seriously. I mostly thought "okay" it will be different and set myself up for quite a shock. The "Westcoast" bubble of personal space will be non-existent. Much as I elaborated on my previous answers, it is about being two different people while you are there. You must be Indian during the day and check your American assumptions constantly, somewhat have your guard up. When you are back in your hostel, relax and try to understand the day you went through. Take time to be alone with your own thoughts for a while. This was my strategy to remain sane and fresh for the next day.

I would recommend for having in your hostel is some sort of entertainment whether it be reading or watching a show that you like. This helps act as a buffer to the culture especially when first arriving. I treated my room as my little asylum to breakdown each day. In addition to this it is incredibly important to keep whatever you use for your American escape IN YOUR ROOM. Taking a book or ipod with you to a camp to pass time defeats the entire purpose of the internship, during the day be open and receptive, treat everything as a learning experience.

To add a little more, it makes the biggest difference when you approach everything with enthusiasm. Even some of the slower days are ten times better when you are energetic about things. Do not allow yourself to get bogged down with thinking it is boring or what you would rather be doing. You are in INDIA for the purpose of learning so make the most of it. There will be plenty of time to sit on the couch at home when you return home.

In summary, have an escape so that you may remain fresh and energetic throughout the day. Keep your American escape and Indian work separate, you are there to take experiences away from India. Listen to everything IE3 has to prepare you, they know what they're talking about. Prepare as much as you can for this internship but understand this is a whole new world, you're stepping into. You're going to have some amazing experiences and remember the stories in the end will be worth the time spent during the day.