

**Penn State College of Medicine Global Health Center
Medical Student Project Report – Xavier Candela**

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Program/Project Title: Global Health Scholars Program in Koforidua, Ghana

Program/Project Location: Koforidua, Ghana

Program/Project Timetable: June 15 – July 15, 2018

Summary of Experience:

During my month in Ghana, I was responsible for learning about the Ghanaian culture and being engaged in presentations, lessons, and discussions about their values, healthcare systems, and culture. I was also responsible for rotating through various specialties within Eastern Regional Hospital, the regional hospital in Koforidua. During my time at ERH, I took the lead on obtaining breast cancer patient information, talking with administration and staff about researcher chart access, and the progress of the local Surgical burden of disease study. Additionally, I also did some photography and film work for the hospital.

Overall, I had a phenomenal experience during my time in Ghana. The faculty that accompanied the trip were passionate and engaging with the material and discussions throughout, the thoroughly enjoyed the company of the other two students who I became much closer to throughout the trip, and the people in the host community were extremely welcoming. All of these things contributed to a rich learning experience and an enjoyable four weeks.

Learning Achievements:

I think the most important thing I gained from this trip was an increased perspective of what millions of people's lives are like and a new appreciation for the logistical successes of our culture and what we are able to accomplish both in medicine and more broadly. I learned this by being observant and present for the trip, and trying to construct of past and a future in my head of the people I met. I would like to continue to build my clinical knowledge so when I return I can be responsible for patients and significantly impact outcomes and research efforts.

This trip strengthened my interest in global mission work in healthcare and will give me a greater focus on systems issues throughout healthcare because change at that level can bring even more value to the health of others than strictly clinical work, treating individual patients one at a time. Seeing an old woman fall in triage and hit her head because the stretchers didn't have railings was a strong motivator for this interest in solving systems issues because this incident was entirely preventable. I can only imagine how many other patients unduly suffer because they fall through the "cracks" of systems issues.

Program Strengths:

The most valuable components of the experience were the dynamic opportunities to be involved in both clinical and research projects that are making differences in real time. I also felt very included and viewed as an equal in the team, made up of many physicians and residents, which was motivating in itself.

Program Shortcomings:

I thought this trip did an excellent job with health, safety, and logistical concerns for students but one thing I would have liked to have more information upfront on is the malaria risk and the recent Penn State members who were affected. This would have allowed me to read up and inform myself of the specifics on prevention, items to pack, etc. to give me a better peace of mind. I obviously knew that malaria was a risk but I didn't have a good understanding of the degree of the risk until in country.

Impact:

I have traveled to Korea, Japan, Costa Rica, Panama, several countries throughout Europe, but my time and experiences in Africa were truly unique and vastly different than my expectations. I really bonded with the people, especially ones similar to my age, because we shared so much in common but they lived in such a different physical condition than myself. This made me feel much more "connected" to the African people, and made me want to be involved in the process of making Africa into a developed continent. How this involvement will come to fruition is still to be determined.

I think this experience made me more appreciative of the resources that I have in my own life, and gave me a greater sense of moral responsibility to pay it forward to others with my efforts within my medical career. I have had prior interest in becoming involved in an annual global mission trip which was inspired with my service work with organizations such as habitat for humanity. This trip, further solidified this interest and showed me, first hand, the need for education and medical intervention in some of these underdeveloped countries.



