



Social Welfare and Public Health in West Africa

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LOCATION: Cape Coast, Ghana

Ghana is a country located on the coast of West Africa and home to about 26.8 million residents. Ghana is known for their wildlife, beaches, and slave trade castles that were turned into museums. While Ghana's first language is English, in the smaller cities like Cape Coast most of the locals speak the native language of Twi or Fante.

Fun Facts:

- Cape Coast is a city and fishing port on the coast of Ghana, that is home to about 170,000 people.
- The University of Cape Coast is Ghana's leading university in teaching and research.
- Although the average number of physicians in Ghana is about 1,400, the need for them in rural areas is the greatest. This is due to relocation, working conditions, and financial limitations.

Placement/Project Information

I volunteered at Cape Coast Teaching Hospital for four weeks. My first two weeks was in the Social Welfare unit and the following two weeks I spent in Public Health. For my project I wrote a 10 page paper about how medical social work is portrayed in Ghana, and also about the differences in healthcare.

Outcomes

Volunteering in Social Welfare and Public Health were both very different experiences but equally rewarding.

Social Welfare: I learned that although medical social work is not as relevant in Ghana as it is in the United States, it still plays a very important role behind the scenes. There was only one social worker for the entire hospital (whoa!) and she managed most, if not all, of the low-income patient financial services. Here I got to help and interact with patient assessments, discharge planning, and follow up.

Public Health: This department was completely run by nursing staff. Each day of the week there was different clinic, I was able to experience the Child Welfare Clinic and HIV Clinic, while also going into the different hospital wards to educate mothers with newborn babies the importance of immunizations and malaria prevention.

Healthcare: Most of Ghana's healthcare is provided and funded by their government. In 2003 the country adopted the National Health Insurance Scheme to promote universal health insurance coverage for all Ghanaians. This healthcare package covers about 95% of residents and consists of basic health care services including: outpatient consultations, essential drugs, inpatient care and shared accommodation, maternity care, eye, dental and emergency care.

Skills Utilized/Developed

Critical Thinking: Assisting in finding ways to help patients whom live in poverty afford the health care that they need.

Cultural Competency: Researching about the West African culture before and during my trip. Being culturally aware of my surroundings and adjusting to the cultural changes around me.

Setting Boundaries: Wanting to go the extra mile to help patients was tempting, so setting boundaries was one of the most important skills I had to utilize during my time abroad.

Classroom Connections

613 Behavioral, Psychological and Ecological Aspects of Health and Disease: This course helped me get a better understanding of how environmental factors can lead to long-term health problems. That an individual's health not only depends on self-care but the environment that they live in as well.

699 Social Work Practice in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention: This course prepared me with more education about chronic diseases and life-style changes. We learned how to have those uncomfortable conversations and finding a "new normal" way of living life.



Lessons Learned

The patient/client knows what is best for themselves, even if you think otherwise.

You cannot force someone to change if they are not ready. Old behavior is not going to change unless the person chooses to make positive life decisions on their own, and is able to take control of their life. Empowerment is key.

Advice

Get to know the locals and engage in the beautiful culture that surrounds you. Going out of your comfort zone may be hard at first, but completely worth the while.

Don't be so quick to make assumptions or judgment. Everyone has their own story. Take a step back, sit, and listen to what they want to share.

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