

My Global Health Experiences at Macha Mission Hospital

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In September 2019, I boarded a plane and left Hamilton for a tiny village 13 000 kilometers from home to complete a semester of global health nursing. My destination was Macha Mission Hospital, in rural Southern Province, Zambia. Macha Mission Hospital provides a fully functioning operating room, an HIV/AIDS clinic, a maternal/child clinic with outreach to surrounding areas, an eye clinic, labour and delivery, paediatric, and adult med/surg units to Macha and the surrounding area. Most of the patients seen at Macha



Mission Hospital live in absolute poverty, with the average income in the area being 0.61 CAD a day. Access to clean drinking water and sanitation is extremely limited, and in 2019, a severe drought exacerbated the situation. I was placed in paediatrics, and many of the diseases I saw affecting my young patients (e.g. malnutrition, dehydration/gastroenteritis) were attributable to these inequalities.

My experience in Macha, particularly the first several weeks, challenged me academically, physically, and emotionally. Without having a clinical tutor close by and constantly available, I was forced to develop my own clinical reasoning and judgement. Macha Mission Hospital was



strikingly different from the hospitals I knew at home. It was the first time I had lived and worked without running water and constant electricity. Communication was challenging as I did not speak Tonga, the language spoken by both staff and patients. I was shocked by the inequalities I was witnessing and devastated when their effects came crashing down on the heads of tiny humans, and I wondered what my role could possibly be in this

strange hospital. However, as time passed, and with the help of the nurses with whom I worked, I became used to what had once made me desperately uncomfortable (spiders and cockroaches and nursing in a resource-limited environment). I was welcomed as part of the team, and I took on the role of the nurse, performing assessments, providing care, and advocating for my patients.

My time in Macha pushed me to become more culturally competent in the care I provide. I was forced to uncover and critically examine my own assumptions and biases and challenge myself to see the world through a different perspective. Suddenly I was a minority; I found myself no longer able to sit comfortably back surrounded by people who look and act and think exactly like I do. Through three months of life alongside Zambians, I found many of my values changing and my perspectives shifting. My global health placement was truly a life-altering experience which will continue to affect me both as a human and as a nurse.



Zambia is a beautiful, vibrant country. I will remember it for its red dirt and bright flowers; for the spectacular Victoria Falls, or Mosi-oa-Tunya (“the smoke that thunders”); for its terrifying assortment of snakes and spiders; for its blazing heat and terrific downpours; but mostly for its beautiful, vibrant people. My first experience in global health nursing was stretching and unforgettable, and I am looking forward to taking my nursing career to other countries and cultures.

