

Christine Lim - Impressions Cambodia 2015

The two months I spent in Cambodia were eye-opening, heart-warming and provided a great outlook on human life and how medicine integrates into it. Poverty is rife in Cambodia, their lives are tough and people make do with what they have. There is a growing income gap and inequality is being further compounded by corruption. There were countless times during my stay where I felt incredibly fortunate to be born in my family, live in Australia, study Medicine and have the opportunity to complete an elective in Cambodia.



I am immensely grateful to the Jackson family for their generous scholarship (Dr Carl Richard Jackson Scholarship) that allowed me to gain an incredible experience and insight into Cambodian healthcare and its people.

One of the key cultural lessons I will take away is that the successful practice of Medicine is different in different settings. Cultural sensitivity is of utmost importance as a foreigner in order to gain a patient's and colleagues' trust. Health is perceived differently in different parts of the world and differently by individuals. In order to be attuned to their patient's health goals, a doctor needs to have cultural sensitivity to gain a better understanding of their patient. Seeing how Medicine is practiced in a developing country has taught me to be open to new perspectives to the practice of Medicine.

The practice of Medicine in a resource-limited setting such as in Cambodia teaches you the importance of clinical medicine. The doctors taught me to rely on basic medical principles/signs, clinical experience and good judgment to treat patients. The limitations placed on these doctors also provided an avenue for innovation. Their resourcefulness was something I really admired about them. For example, I saw how they recycled plastic water bottles to be used as spacers. Despite these limitations, the doctors were always able to use humour and laughter to relieve their pressures. With their smiles and welcoming nature, I always felt like a part of the team.



The biggest challenges for me were the different standards of Medicine I witnessed there to what we are used to back in Australia. Compromises have to be made due to resource limitations. It was heartbreaking to see children presenting with advanced presentation of diseases due to fear of Western medicine and lack of financial support. Malnutrition and communicable diseases (dengue, parasites, etc) were common presentations. I was lucky to have spent 4 weeks in an NGO (Angkor Hospital for Children) – provided free treatment, had better funding and could support more expensive investigations and treatment, and 4 weeks in

a public hospital (National Paediatric Hospital) – patient-funded unless they came from low income families, which allowed me to compare and contrast the different systems. It highlighted how valuable the roles NGOs play in the healthcare system in Cambodia.

There were times I felt out of my comfort zone, due to the unfamiliarity of environment, language barrier and challenging medical situations however the medical students and doctors were always ready to help translate or lend a hand. It was great to see their dedication to their work and how they did their duties to the best of their abilities which was available to them.



I would once again like to sincerely thank the Jackson family for this fantastic opportunity to experience Medicine in beautiful Cambodia and to all the Cambodians I met for all the wonderful memories.