

Office for Global Health - Student Impressions

Personal Details

Name	Harrison Odgers
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Nationality	Australian

OGH Placement Details

Country	Cambodia
City / Town	Phnom Penh and Siem Reap
Hospital	National Paediatric Hospital (Phnom Penh) The Lake Clinic (Siem Reap)
Department / Rotations	Respiratory, Gastroenterology, Surgery, General Practice
Start date	Phnom Penh - 4/1/1/2016 Siem Reap - 1/2/2016
End date	Phnom Penh – 29/1/2016 Siem Reap – 26/2/2016
Was this a Stage 3 elective placement?	Yes

Summary of Placement/s

- What were the key medical aspects that you learnt on your OGH placement/s that will contribute to you becoming a better doctor?
- What were the key cultural lessons that you learnt during your placement/s?
- What were the challenges you faced – either organizing the placement or while in-country?
- Please include at least 1 -2 appropriate photos

I spent two months in Cambodia is what I would describe as an enlightening, enjoyable, and at times trying elective experience. My time in Cambodia improved my awareness of how medical systems and practitioners operate in low-resource settings, increased my clinical medical skills and gave me a greater understanding of the Cambodian people.

I spent one month at the National Paediatric Hospital (NPH) in Phnom Penh. During the placement I was able to observe many different types of medical conditions across the respiratory, gastrointestinal and surgical departments. I formed an understanding of how medicine in Cambodia countries is limited by material constraints, and so is practiced differently to Australia. Many diagnostic and therapeutic options that we would take for granted in Australia were not accessible in Cambodia. A great deal of medical decisions were made on clinical experience alone, which in turn means that clinical assessments have to be as accurate as possible. I gained valuable experience in clinical assessment of sick children, and also an understanding of what therapies are used in developing countries.

My second placement was at a NGO called The Lake Clinic (TLC). TLC provides medical care to villagers who live around the Tonle Sap lake south of Siem Reap. The Cambodians who live in these villages have poor quality housing and rely on subsistence fishing and agriculture to provide for their families. Correspondingly there are a large number of health issues among the villages including frequent infections and malnutrition. TLC visits two of these villages per week via their 'floating-clinics'. My experience with TLC again showed me the importance of good clinical skills. TLC workers had to make difficult medical decisions based solely on clinical judgment, as no higher-level investigations available. Spending time in the villages gave me an insight into the social conditions (lack of sanitation, poor housing) which give rise to medical problems we saw. I was also able to observe the implementation of public health programs such as the anti-parasite program, the Vitamin A supplementation program and the Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) program. Cambodian staff at TLC were incredibly generous with their time and made me feel part of the team. This was a rewarding and interesting experience and I thank them deeply.

A major challenge I faced in Cambodia was the communication barrier. English was not spoken by the vast majority of patients at the paediatric hospital, and by no patients in the rural clinics. This meant that all my consultations took place through Cambodian doctors or medical students translating from Khmer to English. Through the translations I was not always able get the level of detail in patient histories that I wished, and I believe some communication became confused. This highlighted to me how

important communication is between patients and clinicians. This was an important challenge to experience as I now have a better idea what to expect if I decide to work overseas in a non-English speaking country.

During my stay I met and talked to many of Cambodian people and saw much of the country. I was always impressed with the Cambodians generosity, kindness and eagerness to talk about Cambodia. Many Cambodians face a great deal of hardship but still manage to have a positive outlook on life. Those Cambodians I met working in healthcare displayed a huge amount of determination and compassion. Cambodia has a tragic modern history, and increasing my knowledge of these issues helped me understand the current situation.

I would like to thank the Jackson family for their assistance through the Dr. Carl Jackson Scholarship. I would not have been able to participate in this experience without their generosity, and for that I am truly grateful.



This is a photo of a clinic at a community center in one of the floating villages on the Tonle Sap lake. In this picture you can see patients being triaged by a nurse (top left), waiting infants being weighed and measured by the community health nurses (center right), and medications being distributed by the pharmacist (top right). The doctor's desk was just out of sight of this photo.

Thank you.

Permissions

	Yes	No
I give permission for any comments written in my report to be quoted in materials produced by the Sydney Medical School		No
I give permission to use any photos supplied to be used in materials produced by the Sydney Medical School		No
I give permission that some queries may be passed on to me in future from other prospective students who are interested in the same or similar placement	Yes	

Date: 2016

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Please return report to:

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THANK YOU!