

Spirit of Life Scholarship

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Project title: Analysis of cost and quality of care for dementia patients in Taiwan vs. the US

Program Location: Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan

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Summary of Experience



This past August I had the opportunity to travel to Taiwan with the Global Health Graduate Internship Program within the Penn State Department of Public Health Sciences. I was in Taiwan for a total of 6 weeks where I studied at the Taipei Medical University. During my time in Taiwan I sat in on lectures everyday which discussed the health care system in Taiwan, focusing on public health, health policy, and epidemiology. After lectures I had the opportunity to conduct my own research which was a comparative study between Taiwan and the United States. My topic was the quality and cost of dementia care in elderly patients in Taiwan v.s. the US. TMU was really helpful in

letting us meet with leading professionals in the health field for us to interview and gain first-hand accounts of our specific interests within the Taiwan healthcare system. My greatest

experience was getting to speak with a health economist who was at the discussion table when Taiwan was going through their healthcare reform back in the 90s. I was so interesting to hear the challenges Taiwan faced during their reform and how similar some aspects are to the United States. You really have to appreciate the patience, teamwork, and maturity of the Taiwanese healthcare professionals, at every level, to agree on a system that most people seem very happy with. I have always said that global health is so important to healthcare because you can share ideas amongst the best minds in the world and learn from the trial and errors of other systems.

Learning Achievements

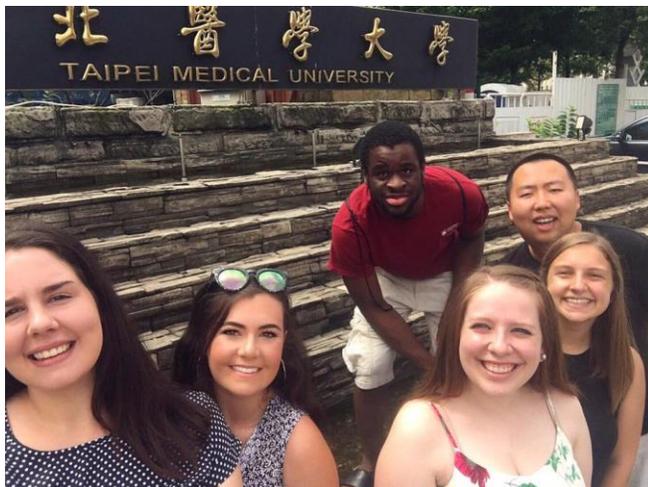
The greatest lesson I learned on my trip was that no healthcare system is perfect and the grass is not always greener. Taiwan is facing the challenge of caring for a large increasing aging



population just like the U.S. and they seem to have just as many (or few) answers on how to handle it as we do. Elderly care in Taiwan is usually taken on by children, and families usually have multiple generations in one household. However, caring for a sick parent can be strenuous so the need for in-home nursing care is high and so is the cost. Taiwan's state of the art EMR system makes healthcare paperless and run more efficiently. However, these records are not shared between systems to ensure competitiveness between hospitals. Not exactly a great situation for coordinated care.

The biggest piece of advice I can give to students traveling in Taiwan is to take advantage of the down time you have and plan trips traveling around the country. The city of Taipei is beautiful but you are missing out on so much culture if you confine yourself to the small city. We were able to spend weekends out of the city hiking in the rural country side and it was the most wonderful experience. Exploring the rural parts of Taiwan really shows you the

heart of Chinese culture.



Strengths and Weaknesses of the Experience

The strengths of this trip were the freedom to research topics that I was interested in and the ability to speak with leading professionals in the health field. I could have probably done a comparative research topic like this at home but holding interviews and getting real experience and input from Taiwanese health professionals

made my learning experience that much more fulfilling and useful. The weakness of this trip was the lack of structure. I wish we would have had more time during the day for lectures with faculty from the university. Although this did give time for us to work on our research projects during the day I felt there definitely could have been more time allotted for lecture.

Trip Impact



This trip has impacted the way I perceive public health and has taught me that there are thousands of ways to have a productive healthcare system and the U.S. really needs to broaden their horizons. This trip also taught me that healthcare is a universal language that everyone speaks, and that no system has the right answer, it is up to the international community to share ideas amongst each other and create systems that benefit their people physically, mentally, and emotionally.