



Pre-Nursing Internship Program

Brooke Thayer

BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

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Small Acts, Lasting Impact: How Service, Compassion, and Community Defined My Internship in Kenya

My journey into healthcare began in kindergarten, though I can't pinpoint exactly why I was drawn to it at such a young age. My enjoyment of doctor visits might have been an early sign, but with no family background in healthcare to spark it, my interest seemed almost instinctive. I found anatomical charts interesting and I didn't even mind the shots. As I progressed through school, my passion for working in a hospital solidified, but I found myself torn between nursing and medical school. Eventually, I chose nursing school, though uncertainty lingered because I wasn't entirely sure what it entailed. Being the first in my family to pursue college added to my uncertainty; I had to figure this out on my own.

Entering nursing school, I fell in love with everything about it. I was certain I had made the right choice. Yet, whenever asked, 'Why nursing and not medicine?' I struggled to give a confident answer. I lacked familial influence in healthcare and had limited hospital experience at that point. Over time, I gained significant clinical exposure, but doubts persisted. Then, I discovered International Medical Aid. Having longed to travel and previously planned to study abroad before COVID disrupted those plans, I saw this as the perfect opportunity to gain clinical experience while exploring the world. Participating in this program was a transformative experience that reaffirmed my decision to pursue nursing. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity it provided.

During my first week of internship, I had the opportunity to rotate between the pediatric outpatient clinic and the inpatient wards, providing me with valuable insights into different hospital settings and healthcare professions. The outpatient clinic, primarily managed by clinical and medical officers, and the inpatient wards, overseen by nurses, offered contrasting but equally enriching experiences. I was particularly thrilled to begin in pediatrics, a potential specialty of interest to me. In the outpatient clinic, I was warmly welcomed by Dr. Ken, who delivered extensive and captivating lectures on common pediatric diseases in Kenya. I shadowed him as he treated a continuous stream of anxious mothers and their children, learning assessment techniques firsthand during patient examinations.

Transitioning to the inpatient setting, I had the privilege of working alongside Sister Wafaa. She graciously guided me through the daily responsibilities of a pediatric nurse at Coast General Hospital. I assisted with basic treatments, obtained vital signs, and helped gather essential supplies. It was here that I quickly learned to think creatively and adapt to various challenges. I observed firsthand the striking differences in resource availability in Kenya compared to healthcare facilities in the U.S., underscoring the challenges and ingenuity required to deliver quality care in a resource-limited

environment. Each day, I was struck by the nurses' resourcefulness—they devised solutions to problems that I, coming from a more privileged background in the U.S., would never have had to solve.

In my spare moments, I cherished conversations with mothers about their children and offered them comfort by giving them a support person. I noticed that Kenyan women exhibited remarkable strength, often adhering to cultural norms that discouraged overt displays of emotion such as fear. Although initially reserved, they gradually opened up during our conversations, revealing their resilience and the deep emotional fear they faced for their children. I frequently visited Sister Wafaa as well as the mothers and children we treated; there will never be anything as refreshing as the feelings that overcame me when returning to the unit to see children who were once battling for their lives now nearly unrecognizable jumping and playing in their cribs. These interactions are among the fondest memories I will carry from this experience as they reaffirmed to me what being a nurse was all about.

During my second week of internship, I immersed myself in the challenging environment of the surgical intensive care unit (ICU). With limited prior experience in such a fast-paced setting, I was grateful for the opportunity to shadow nurses, clinical officers, and medical officers. Under the guidance of Dr. Mohammed, I delved into the intricacies of disease pathology and treatment plans. His interactive teaching style extended beyond clinical practice; he assigned us homework on researching electrolyte imbalances and hormonal conditions, which served as a valuable refresher from my nursing school pathophysiology courses. Beyond academic challenges, Dr. Mohammed posed thought-provoking questions that pushed me to reflect deeply on my internship experience. One particular inquiry resonated with me: What makes nursing different from any other profession where one can also help people? This question challenged me to articulate a meaningful response, one that went beyond clichés about helping others. Through this interaction, I came to the realization that nursing is truly a unique profession. Each and every healthcare provider has a common goal of helping their patient, but how they do it is what makes each profession unique. This reflection helped me articulate a more profound personal mission within the field, driving me to make the most of my internship experience.

My third week was spent rotating between the pediatric and adult accident and emergency units. Similar to ICU, these were faster paced units as one second you could be sitting at the desk reviewing charts and only moments later you could be performing CPR on a child. I spent the majority of my time in the pediatric A&E practicing assessment skills and assisting with treatments. In my spare time, I spent the time conversing with mothers. I felt heartbroken for these mothers, who were alone aside the beds of their sick children. You could see the looks of desperation and hopelessness in their eyes as they begged for us to help their children. These moments give you purpose and fuel for your passion as there is nothing more rewarding than being able to be the best part of the worst day of someone's life.

During the final week of my internship, I had the privilege of working in the labor ward, where I had a profound experience that answered the question that I had been pondering for years. I had the honor of holding the hands of twelve incredibly brave new mothers. These moments became the most meaningful of my internship. Whether they know it or not, I cried tears of joy alongside these women as each beautiful baby entered the world, and I shed tears of sadness with those who were grieving. Witnessing their journeys was a deeply emotional experience for me. Each mother arrived on a stretcher, filled with fear. When their babies were born, their expressions weren't joyous; they were simply filled with relief at having survived the delivery. Maternal mortality rates have risen in Kenya, ranging between "...500 and 999 deaths per 100,000 live births...", making many women fearful for their lives (World Health Organization, 2023). Many of these women were alone—either because their partners weren't allowed in the room or because they were young and had been abandoned by their families out of shame. It was particularly difficult as unlike the United States, birthing women do not routinely receive anesthetics or pain medication in Kenya. So, throughout their labor, I stayed by their sides, offering reassurance and advocacy. I promised them that I would do everything in my power to support them and make the process as comfortable as possible. In their most vulnerable moments, many cried in my arms, expressing gratitude for my presence on what was undoubtedly the hardest and scariest day of their lives. I will never forget these moments as they are what helped solidify my passion for nursing.

My four-week internship at Coast General Hospital not only reaffirmed my passion for nursing but also provided profound insights into the healthcare challenges in Kenya. I witnessed firsthand how limited healthcare literacy and overall accessibility due to financial constraints often prevent individuals from accessing essential care (Ilinca et al., 2019). The shocking contrast between healthcare systems was highlighted further when I learned that in 2021, healthcare expenditure per capita in Kenya was approximately \$95 USD, compared to \$12,470 USD in the United States (World Bank Group, 2024). This significant disparity in resources, coupled with the resilience and ingenuity of Kenyan healthcare workers, has inspired me to be an educated advocate for providing equitable healthcare.

I plan to incorporate this newfound knowledge into my practice by actively engaging in policy advocacy to support healthcare reforms that address disparities. I am dedicated to remaining educated and open to learning about healthcare policy worldwide. I will use this passion and my clinical experience to promote culturally competent care and advocate for access to resources for underserved populations. By staying informed about global health issues and working to implement evidence-based practices, I am committed to bridging gaps in healthcare access and improving patient outcomes. This experience has ignited a passion and I am dedicated to applying these insights to make a meaningful impact in the field of nursing.

In conclusion, my internship with International Medical Aid has been transformative, deepening my global healthcare experience and reaffirming my passion for nursing. This journey has clarified that my interest in healthcare lies in the patient-centered approach of nursing, rather than the broader focus of medicine. Each rotation, from pediatrics to obstetrics, has enhanced my clinical skills and broadened my understanding of healthcare disparities, strengthening my role as a patient advocate. I've developed a greater sense of compassion and a strong commitment to supporting vulnerable populations. This experience has solidified my determination to pursue a nursing career where I can make a meaningful impact. I am excited to apply the knowledge and perspectives gained to provide compassionate, culturally competent care and am grateful for the lessons and relationships that will guide me through my final year of school and into my professional career.

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EMAIL

admissions@medicalaid.org

ADDRESS

1629 K Street NW Suite 300

Washington, DC 20006