



Nursing Internship Program

Mia Waxman

ST. OLAF COLLEGE

SUMMER 2025 ALUMNI

Beyond Borders: How Kenya Shaped My Purpose in Nursing

For as long as I can remember, I have loved to travel. One of my greatest inspirations is family travel journalist Garrett Gee, co-founder of the award-winning travel-lifestyle brand The Bucket List Family. A Utah-born entrepreneur and content creator, Gee and his wife sold all their belongings after selling a mobile scanning app to Snapchat for \$54 million, embarking on a world tour that has now spanned more than 65 countries over the past decade. What drew me most to The Bucket List Family was their philosophy of travel, rooted in adventure, culture, and service. This approach transforms each trip into more than a destination; it becomes a journey of personal growth, global connection, and lasting impact.

Africa has been on my bucket list for as long as I can remember. From its extraordinary wildlife to its rich and diverse cultures, the continent offers unparalleled experiences. As the world's second-largest continent, Africa holds vast reserves of fossil fuels, precious gems, and valuable metals. Home to nearly 1.4 billion people, most of them young, it remains economically developing, with a significant portion of the population living in poverty. Yet, according to the World Economic Forum, Africa is prioritizing economic growth by providing "financial support to innovative and dynamic startups, spurring job creation and technological advancements across the continent" (Masiga, 2025). The wildlife alone is captivating, lions, elephants, leopards, and countless other species roam free. I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience this remarkable setting during my internship in Mombasa, Kenya.

The past four weeks in Kenya have been transformative. Through my internship with International Medical Aid, I rotated through multiple departments at Coast General Teaching and Referral Hospital, including Accident and Emergency, Obstetrics and Gynecology, the Newborn Unit, and Radiology. I also sought out extra opportunities, such as afternoon shifts in the Intensive Care Unit and overnight shifts in both Accident and Emergency and Obstetrics and Gynecology. Alongside these rotations, I participated in community clinics and led educational sessions where I provided vital health information. These experiences were both professionally enriching and personally humbling, lessons I will carry with me throughout my career.

Coming from the United States, I am accustomed to a healthcare system that is primarily privatized, supplemented by public hospitals and nonprofit organizations. While U.S. healthcare is among the most expensive in the world, spending rose 7.5% in 2023 to \$4.9 trillion, or \$14,570 per capita (AMA, 2025), it is often characterized by advanced technology and high-quality care. By contrast, Kenya's healthcare system is divided into three sectors: public health, commercial private health, and faith-

based organizations. Public facilities, though the most accessible and affordable, often face shortages of staff, equipment, and supplies, which can impact patient outcomes and increase the risk of hospital-acquired infections. The private sector offers higher-quality care and stronger doctor–patient relationships but comes with prohibitive costs. Faith-based organizations, such as the Christian Health Association of Kenya (CHAK) and the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, provide approximately 30% of the nation's healthcare (IMA, 2025).

Despite the presence of diverse providers, Kenya's system faces significant challenges, including high burnout rates among healthcare workers, inadequate compensation, limited resources, and gaps in public health education. Poverty compounds these issues, contributing to malnutrition, poor working conditions, and the spread of preventable diseases. Communicable diseases, noncommunicable diseases, and trauma-related injuries remain major public health burdens. HIV remains the leading cause of mortality, responsible for 15% of deaths nationwide (IMA, 2025), with rates disproportionately high in certain regions due to poverty, limited prevention strategies, and resource constraints (NIH, 2024).

This experience has reshaped my understanding of healthcare. Working in an environment with limited resources strengthened my adaptability and problem-solving skills while deepening my commitment to equitable access to care. I now feel an even stronger calling to work in underserved communities, both locally and globally, delivering clinical care while promoting education and preventive measures to reduce health disparities.

My time in East Africa reinforced my belief that healthcare is about far more than treating illness; it is about prevention, advocacy, and compassion. Observing Kenyan healthcare workers provide exceptional care despite resource limitations inspired me to carry forward the values of resilience, creativity, and teamwork in my nursing career. This internship not only confirmed my desire to be a nurse but also gave me a greater purpose: to advocate for health equity, serve with empathy, and deliver high-quality care to those who need it most.

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EMAIL

admissions@medicalaid.org

ADDRESS

1629 K Street NW Suite 300

Washington, DC 20006