



Pre-Medicine Internship Program

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SUMMER 2025 ALUMNI

Make Sure Your Soul Gains More Than Your Hands: My Transformative Medical Internship in Mombasa, Kenya

Everyone comes into this world with nothing. Most people spend their whole lives working to have something—then leave this world with nothing again. So, your soul must gain more than your hands. That sentiment has come to define the way I view my daily life after my internship in Mombasa, Kenya.

I've always struggled to find my passion and purpose. Yes, I have things I enjoy doing, but nothing defines who I am as an individual. It's something I've prayed about for as long as I can remember but never quite felt to come to fruition. That changed during my time in Mombasa. I found the importance of being a part of a community greater than myself and the impacts small actions can have on others for an eternity. I can truly say it set me on the path to becoming a better version of myself—a better future physician and a better friend. I witnessed the beginning of life, formed lifelong friendships, and saw the end of life. The full cycle. And through it all, I was challenged to value every part of my life more deeply.

****Birth.**** As Dr. Shazim would say in every debrief, "Let's start at the beginning of life. Maternity." Before arriving at Coast General Teaching and Referral Hospital, I was pretty determined to become a pediatrician. I have always been somewhat apprehensive about going into a specialty where death was on the line, and admittedly I had never stepped into a surgery prior to theater 2 at Coast General. Thus, I have spent most of my shadowing hours in a pediatric clinic. However, surprisingly, the maternity ward quickly became my favorite rotation. I could directly see my feelings about Kenya correspond to labor. Mothers spend months preparing to deliver their babies. They feel everything—excitement, fear, anxiety. There's always an adrenaline rush. No one knows exactly what will happen, but the mothers, nurses, and physicians prepare for the moment a baby finally comes into this world expectantly. That's exactly how I felt arriving in Kenya—a rush of emotions and so much uncertainty. A dream I'd held since high school was finally coming true, but I had no idea what to expect. The culture shock, the unknown, the lack of healthcare resources—it was all very real. But the maternity ward shaped me into the kind of physician I want to become. Witnessing a woman's intense pain during labor to then peacefully hold her newborn is a moment I will carry with me. Despite the challenges of pursuing a career in medicine, like labor, being a part of some of the most shaping and important aspects of someone's lives will make it worth it. In Mombasa I thought I'd be most influenced by the physicians, but it was the strength of the women that inspired me. They made me want to be the best physician I can be—for them. From C-sections to natural births, witnessing the beginning of life reminded me that nothing is guaranteed. I walked away with a new calling: to pursue a career in obstetrics and

gynecology. I looked back on my journal entries for my rotation in the maternity ward, and I couldn't help but smile. The women I directly got to help, either by stretching with them during labor or holding their hands, I will always remember, and that empathy I learned while in Kenya will shape me into the best physician I can become.

****Friendship.**** Throughout my life, many people have influenced me. I'm a firm believer in "friends for different seasons"—some friendships fade, and some stand the test of time. Friendship is an impactful aspect of a person's life and shapes who they are and become. In Mombasa, I saw the true value of friendship: in patients, mentors, fellow interns, and strangers. Growing up, I attended the same private school from kindergarten to senior year. I graduated with seven people, and I was not challenged to step outside my comfort zone and interact with different types of individuals. However, during my time in Kenya, I was able to reflect on different friendships I had encountered and truly what I had learned from other individuals in my daily life. There were friends who rallied together after tough shifts at the hospital. Friends like Hilda and Michelle, who made Mombasa feel like home. Patients who opened up to me—confided in me—as if we had known each other for years. Strangers asking me what I was doing in Mombasa and fully welcoming me into their city and culture. There were friends who became like family. I watched physicians rally around one another to care for a community in need. That kind of camaraderie—rooted in compassion—deepened my belief in the importance of human connection in medicine. According to Harvard Health, medicine has somewhat lost its human connection due to technology: "At its best, being a doctor is an extraordinary and intimate privilege. We build relationships with our patients and see them through times of both joy and suffering; our relationships with each other help us through the same. It's hard to do that in a way that's truly satisfying when we spend most of the day at the computer screen" (Harvard Health, 2016). At Coast General, resources and technology are very limited, and these physicians and nurses must communicate with the patients and peers, which depends on human connection and in turn often creates a more positive experience for the patient. I specifically saw this at the medical clinics, as physicians had limited resources but collaborated and did their best to help every individual, which is something I deeply admire.

****Death.**** I wasn't prepared to see someone take their last breath. I expected panic, sadness, maybe fear. Whenever I have had a loved one die in the past, I usually view it in a negative way. But the death I witnessed was peaceful—like the patient was ready. In a strange way, that's how I felt leaving Mombasa. I expected to be in tears, not ready to leave the place I had called home for the past month. But instead, I felt peace. Peace that I had experienced something life-changing. Peace that I had grown spiritually, emotionally, and personally. Peace that I had found friendships that would last a lifetime. In a way, this feeling of "death" will stick with me as I start my career to become a physician. The feeling

of peace is advice I can pass onto others who are losing a loved one. Death is inevitable, but while in Kenya I learned it can also be peaceful. Death does not have to have a negative connotation, but the narrative of death can be changed for the better. "If you think about it, life is nothing but thoughts, and our thoughts come from the mind. Our thoughts are an internal path leading us somewhere. To the next thought, the next idea, the next life. Everything is created with thought—emotions, designs, and theories. Where thoughts lead us is the most important thing; it's our inner path leading to freedom or suffering" (At Peace With Death | Bennington College, n.d.). The people in Kenya were steadfast in their faith, and this helped me realize that in some way we are all just walking each other home. I feel like this is an important lesson to take with me in my journey to become a physician, as I have to come to peace with death and help loved ones keep moving forward in their lives.

****Souls.**** Souls tie people together. A soul is what makes someone who they are—and it's shaped by every experience, every relationship. Kenya changed my soul for the better. I poured into others. I learned patience. I experienced a completely different culture and let it shape me. In the pediatric outpatient ward, I met a young girl named Nora who became obsessed with a balloon glove I made for her. That small gesture—something so simple—brought her joy, and in turn, filled me with joy. It made me more aware of how even the smallest acts can have a big impact on someone else's soul. Yes, Kenya was culturally different from my small town in Georgia. But what struck me most was the people—their outpouring of love and gratitude. They valued what they had. They didn't take life for granted. In the Western world, we often measure worth by material things—by how much we have, not by how full our lives are. But in Kenya, I saw the meaning of the phrase "Make sure your soul gains more than your hands." Even amidst poverty and corruption, people remained faithful, grounded, and fulfilled. That lesson is one I'll carry for life. Before Kenya, I struggled to articulate my "why" for medicine. My answer was something generic—"I enjoy helping others." But now, I understand it's deeper than that. Medicine isn't just about helping others—it's about having a soul-level impact. What I saw, experienced, and endured in Kenya wasn't easy. The children begging for food outside our Ubers, the lack of basic life-saving devices in the hospital, and people dying due to lack of ICU beds. None of this was glorious, but the community of people that rallied around each other was. Despite differences in ethnic and religious backgrounds, I saw new mothers look out for each other and their newborns, which is a testament to the people in Kenya and the type of person I want to be for others in my life and when I become a physician.

Following my arrival home from Kenya, I was asked to speak at church about my experience. I gave my presentation about my time in Kenya and the ways Mombasa and Coast General impacted my life. I will still struggle to put into words the impact the experience had on me. However, unbeknownst to me, the sermon directly following my speech was about souls. About how people have started to value what

they materially have in this life over friendships and the impact they have on others. But whenever one dies, none of those materialistic things goes with them, but their soul does. The experiences and impacts that others have on their soul go with them to their next life. Thus, I realized that the impact Kenya had on my life will stay with my soul forever, and consequently the impact I had on others will stay with their souls. Those who connect medicine with the soul are the difference between a good physician and a great physician. The main physician I saw this connection in was Dr. Faruk. Spending the day with him in the diabetes and thyroid clinic, he taught me the importance of finding my voice and passion in medicine that subsequently has an impact on others' lives. He is starting his own nonprofit to help children with type 1 diabetes get access to insulin. This is something he is passionate about and will have an amazing impact when accomplished. Dr. Faruk is an inspiration for me, as he is the physician I want to become. A physician who is not in it for the money or for the fame but is in it for the direct impact that they have on others' souls and daily lives. As Sir William Osler said, "The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease" (Centor, 2007). International Medical Aid has shaped me into the physician I want to become. My time in Mombasa taught me the importance of understanding each patient's story and beliefs, and the responsibility I have now to leave a lasting impact on everyone I meet. These challenges and lessons will stick with me forever and my growth as an individual is all accredited to my experience in Mombasa, Kenya.

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