



Pre-Dentistry Internship Program

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Asante Sana, Kenya: My Transformative Dentistry Internship Experience with International Medical Aid

Dear Kenya,

There are no words to describe how incredible of a country you are. Even though I was more than 8,000 miles from home, you made the distance feel not as far. Your people, the culture, and everything you stand for have opened my eyes to the immeasurable amounts of your compassion and the pride you hold. When I first arrived on your soil, there was this beautiful collision between nerves and excitement I had never felt before. Even though I had researched and read about all that you had to offer, I was still shocked to see the bustling streets of people that were shoulder to shoulder, the nonexistent streetlights or road signs, and the endless sidewalks lined with vendors. I got to experience the sunrise over the horizon of the Indian Ocean and watch the colors of the night sky fade away from the residency balconies. I saw Fort Jesus, MacKinnon Market, and other prominent landmarks that show the deep roots of your history. On the Maasai Mara Safari I learned about local customs and saw exotic animals, including the Big Five. Even learning simple phrases from your language made me feel more connected to others and allowed me the chance to show my respect towards everyone.

My favorite days were those when we hosted our outreach clinics in your local communities. We helped the men, women, and children of these places by providing them with necessary medical resources and instructions on how to stay safe and healthy during their lives. My favorite clinic was when we visited Coast Girls' High School and presented an educational lecture on Women's Health and Hygiene. According to the World Bank Group, five hundred million women across the world have inadequate care when it comes to menstrual hygiene. Lack of supplies and education on how to effectively manage these health concerns have many adverse implications. It can cause disease, and lack of confidence, and make it easy for other complications to arise. Our goal was to create an environment where the girls at this school felt safe and comfortable asking questions regarding menstruation, the women's reproductive system, and other related topics. The girls were attentive, asked great questions, and enjoyed our presence. We were even able to give them menstrual products as our way of saying thank you and further pushing the importance of management. There were still times when I wished I could do more for you and your people. You made it difficult to leave a place where I consciously knew that people were in poverty, struggling, and suffering. Yet, you gave me hope from the impactful experiences that I witnessed and most importantly, a love that goes far beyond the walls of any hospital. I know I will visit you again someday and find more ways to make a difference in people's lives. Until then, I will use all that I have learned to continue towards my goal of becoming the most compassionate, competent, and confident dentist I can be. Asante sana, Kenya.

Dear International Medical Aid Staff and Interns,

It was my greatest pleasure and highest honor to get the opportunity to know you and learn your stories. I was welcomed not as a guest, but as an integral member of the IMA group. I feel that I have truly made lifelong friends and strong relationships that span across states and continents thanks to the efforts of International Medical Aid. Everyone continues to be supportive and caring as we move on to our new chapters in healthcare professions. It has been one month since my departure and my days have been filled with warm wishes to all as we continue adjusting to our lives without one another. It was with you all that I learned of the Healthcare systems, financial and resource constraints, and other challenges people face daily. There is a severe lack of human capital, varying standards of quality and sanitation, a prevalence of preventive diseases, ethnic discrimination, and deteriorating working conditions in which the sectors of healthcare struggle most. Witnessing these barriers every day not only makes one fortunate for what they have but begs the question of what else can be done. I know many of my fellow interns became proactive and started donating supplies, holding GoFundMe's, and holding themselves responsible for checking in on specific patients. My personal goal is to one day return with the sole mission of giving people the best quality of dental care possible for their issues and donating equipment that allows hospital staff to better treat future people.

From getting us safely to our destinations to providing us with fabulous meals, and accommodating the needs of everyone, IMA gave me the peace of mind to focus on what mattered most during my time in Kenya: learning, educating, and helping. It was this experience that opened my eyes to the possibility of pediatric dentistry, made me start putting my goals into perspective, and gave me the desire to return with more knowledge on how to assist those in need. I cannot wait to see where these upcoming years take us, and I am looking forward to watching everyone's story unfold. Asante sana, International Medical Aid family.

Dear Coast General Teaching and Referral Hospital,

Learning about the types of diseases patients often deal with, the lack of mental health treatment, and the common issues that Kenyans face daily was staggering. HIV, malaria, tuberculosis, diabetes, and respiratory infections are just a few causes of mortality that we see across Kenya. While all of these are treatable and often preventable, there is a lack of medicine, protection, or education on them that results in higher prevalences. While I did not interact with patients who had these as their main concerns, there are different procedures to take in the dental unit when understanding the patient's history. I connected with your dental specialists who gave me valuable insights on the procedures they follow. I got to see how resourceful these doctors are and how treatment varies globally. Every member of the hospital was educated and ready to share their own experiences and how they approached different cases. What

came to me as a shock was how patient history is taken and filed. Everything is still done by hand, and the patients are the ones responsible for keeping their X-rays, files, and other important documents of reference. It is incredible to see the different spectrums of dentistry and how care can be given. I broadened my horizons in the field of dentistry, but I was also fortunate enough to participate in the overnight shifts that other departments offered. It is not every day that you get to witness three C-sections and three live births on the same day as your birthday. There is so much still to learn from you, your doctors, and your patients, but for now, we will have to wait until I see you again. Asante sana, CGTRH.

Dear Family and Friends,

I do not know how to say thank you. A thank you does not begin to touch the surface of how grateful I am for you all. There has been nothing more reassuring than having you all in my corner rooting me on in my every endeavor. The support, generosity, and sacrifices each of you have made are invaluable and have left me forever changed. This trip meant more to me than I could ever imagine, and I am so glad that you were able to live vicariously through me during this time. Getting the chance to update everyone or talk about my time in the hospital was always my favorite way to finish off my nights. I hope each of you enjoy all the pictures I sent back and the stories that are yet to be told. A special thank you to my parents, grandparents, brother, and girlfriend is much deserved. You understand the effort I have put into my future and all that I aspire to be. You are all the cornerstones of my life, and I could not imagine taking on my feats without any of you. Asante sana, family, and friends.

Dear Nathan,

You did it. You traveled overseas, made new connections, and made your shadow time worthwhile. I am deeply proud of all the people you met and helped during this journey. You spread smiles to children, opened conversations with your fellow interns, and talked to doctors about their paths and reasons for being where they are now. Thank you for having the courage and the passion for dentistry that you do. You are going to be a rockstar throughout graduate school, during your years of associate work, and into your practice one day. You may think that this trip was only a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but you are just getting started. Asante sana, Nathan.

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