

Tanzania SSE Reflective Piece

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During February/ March this year I spent my four-week Student Selective Experience (SSE) in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. I organised my placement through Work the World and was so happy that I did. They offered an amazing experience with the guarantee of safety.

I had decided that I wanted to do my placement in the field of Obstetrics and was allocated to Amana hospital, a large regional hospital. Going into the placement I was apprehensive about what to expect. I was hoping to get as much practical experience as possible – hopefully assist with a few deliveries and practice my cannulation, venepuncture and catheterisation skills. Nothing could have prepared me for the amount of responsibility I was given!

Rather than attach myself to one consultant, I was recommended to move around the department and get to know as many members of the staff as possible. I ended up splitting my time between labour ward and C- section as I found I got the most out of these areas, was able to help the most and easily got away with knowing just a bit of Swahili (the healthcare professionals speak English, but the patients usually do not.)

A typical day involved heading off to the hospital early (catching the local bus to get there) and spending most of my time on labour ward. The maternity ward in Tanzania is very different from Australia and was quite a shock. There are usually multiple women to a bed, no linen and certainly no pain relief. Midwives have a very different role, they are purely involved in the delivery of the baby and very rarely is any care given to the woman in labour. In fact I was shocked at the attitudes of the health care professional to the women who were clearly in a lot of pain. It wasn't uncommon to see a labouring woman being slapped around and told to stop screaming.

If there was an emergency section I would often follow the women through theatre, take the baby and make sure it was okay. There were opportunities to scrub in and at one stage I was even asked to do the C- section by myself (I did not take them up on this offer!)

I used my AMSF scholarship money to spend the final week in a rural village called Kidodi. Whilst the village was slow and the locals didn't speak any English we were able to do a lot – weighing of the children, immunisations, taking blood, antenatal clinic and cervical cancer screening. We stayed with a lovely local woman and her family in a typical rural house – no furniture, bucket shower etc. It was amazing, the children were fantastic and we felt very much at home. Each afternoon we did a different activity – everything from bike riding to traditional dancing and traditional healers.

Through Work the World I felt safe and supported. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to meet other students from all over the world. On the weekends we chose to do some travelling – Zanzibar, safari, Bongoyo Island.

I loved everything about my experience! I went in with the hopes of experiencing how medicine differs in a developing country and to refine my skills in delivering. I met all those objectives and more. I highly recommend this experience to anyone with a similar desire. I was amazing, you won't regret it!