

Summer Enrichment 2022: Himalayan Health Exchange (Spiti Valley)

For my Brody Scholars Summer Enrichment Program, I embarked on a 21 day journey with Himalayan Health Exchange to Spiti Valley, India. This program brought together medical professionals to serve individuals in the region. I can easily say that this global health experience was one of the most memorable and special experiences of my life.



The Himalayan Health Exchange is an international healthcare program designed to bring individuals to the remote areas of the Himalayas as both a cultural and medical opportunity to serve and learn from the region. My group consisted of a pediatrician, an oncologist, two family nurse practitioners, a dentist, acupuncturist, and around 27 students from the USA, Canada, United Kingdom, and medical residents from India.



Throughout the duration of my trip, we held 10 clinic days and saw over 850 patients. Our clinics were set up as learning opportunities for medical students, as we would work with a translator to conduct the assessment and exam, and report back to the attending on our next steps and medication protocol for each patient. Following the approval of the attending, the patient was sent to the pharmacy tent to pick up their medications, all free of cost to them.

A very fascinating part of my trip was having the opportunity to spend a day with the dental team and a day with the acupuncturist. As a medical student, the exposure to the mouth and teeth are very minimal and being able to see the transformative work the dentist was doing for free for the individuals in this region was eye-opening. Dental care is a crucial component of healthcare, and being able to work with a team that provided immediate relief to some of those individuals was a rewarding feeling.



Additionally, having an acupuncturist on our team was a huge help as we worked with the problems facing our patients. Many of the patients were more comfortable with an eastern approach to medicine and having the option to provide that for our patients allowed us to provide better patient care and outcomes.

Our clinics were set up in varying locations in the cities we visited including monasteries, local hospitals, nunneries, and elderly homes. We even held a clinic in Kibber, the highest permanent human settlement in the world. Our patient cases varied from joint pain, eye irritations, GERD, and wellness checks to more severe cases including thoracic outlet syndrome, a broken wrist that healed incorrectly, neuropathy due to landslide trauma and severe mitral valve regurgitation on a 16 year old.

Every evening, a member of the team was assigned a topic to bring for group discussion, ranging from traditional medicine approaches, diseases native to the region, Northern India diets, and Tibetan history to name a few. This allowed us to get a better understanding of the medical issues we were seeing in the clinic as well as cultural humility for the multifaceted lives of our patients.

When not in clinics, we were able to do lots of hiking and exploring of the cities we were visiting. We would often play cricket with the locals, have Indian dance parties with our drivers who served as translators, and grow closer with other medical students who were on the trip with us. We spent two days

at the end of our trip camping in Chatru before heading to Manali, a touristy ski-resort town, on our way back home.



Throughout this trip, I had many moments of self reflection and introspection on my reasons for pursuing a global health trip. I feel very comforted by Himalayan Health Exchange's emphasis on patient care continuity. The program was founded in 1996 by Ravi Singh, a native of Himachal Pradesh, who works to ensure that patients have access to care year round. This is done by both the global health programs that students participate in as well as his work at establishing permanent clinics in many of the towns we travel to. This was a key component of me choosing this trip, as I wanted the patients to have access to care beyond the time I spent abroad.



This trip was an adventure of a lifetime and taught me about different fields of medicine and the importance of a strong team to provide the best care for my future patients. After a long first year in the Brody classrooms, it was exciting to use the knowledge I obtained to help make changes in the lives of future patients and work with clinicians who were so eager to help me grow my medical skillset. I am incredibly grateful for the communities of Spiti Valley that welcomed us and shared their culture with our team. Even more so, I owe so much gratitude to the Brody Foundation for allowing me the opportunity to become a more understanding, compassionate, and globally aware future physician.

