

WCM-Q students visit Tanzania to learn about global health challenges

Doha – May 23, 2017: Students from Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) experienced the challenges of delivering healthcare in a low-income environment when they spent a week in Tanzania where they had the chance to work on public health projects.

First-year medical students Zaid Shahrory, Fawzi Zghyer, Abivarma Chandrakumaran, Sudarshan Srivats and Saad Sameer, and fourth-year student Zahra H. Rahman spent a week in Mwanza in northern Tanzania, where they worked alongside local medical students and medical residents from NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital in the US. The students provided volunteer service work for Tanzanian initiative called RASA (Reach All, Serve All), a licensed governmental organization that provides community-screening services to inhabitants that live in remote locations in northern Tanzania in the Lake District that surrounds Lake Victoria.

The team was joined by Swahili-speaking volunteer health care workers and screened more than 1,200 inhabitants who came to one of three mobile clinics, which were set up near schools in the district of Sengeremo and the market place in Mwanza city.

Student Zaid Shahrory said: “Visiting Tanzania made me realize how fortunate we are to have access to very good healthcare services in Qatar. We saw people suffering very severely from diseases that are relatively easy and cheap to prevent with vaccinations.”

The WCM-Q students were guided on the trip by WCM-Q’s Dr. Stella Major, Associate Professor of Family Medicine in Clinical Medicine, and Faten Shunnar, Acting Director of Student Affairs.

The Division of Student Affairs at WCM-Q sponsors a number of WCM-Q students to visit the east African country each year to help them gain a new perspective of global health issues and contribute to health outreach programs. Tanzania is a resource-poor country where GDP per capita is approximately \$1,300 and healthcare facilities are extremely limited. Life expectancy is 51 years. In the area the students visited, Lake Victoria serves as the main source of water for most of northern Tanzania’s inhabitants, despite being infested with schistosomiasis and bilharzia (parasitic diseases).

For three days, the team conducted screening activities for close to 500 men and women each day. The screenings involved a brief cardiac risk-factor assessment, a height and weight check to determine the body mass index, and measurement of blood pressure and blood glucose levels. Patients were counseled on modifiable risk factors, and were referred on to receive further care when necessary.

In Mwanza the students also visited Weill Bugando University College of Health Sciences, a center of excellence in medical training supported by Weill Cornell. The training center is affiliated with Bugando Medical Centre, a 900-bed referral hospital, which the students also visited. They also learnt about the risks albino communities in East Africa face, and how local security forces work with healthcare agencies to enhance community awareness about albinism, and ensure that these vulnerable communities are cared for by the provision of adequate sun protection treatments, as well as safety from abuse.



Fourth-year medical student Zahra H. Rahman said: “This trip has made me feel even more strongly about the importance of global health. Many of the same problems Tanzania has affect public health in my home country of India and this has strengthened my resolve to one day return home to help people there.”

The team was also able to visit the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, which is home to lions, black rhinoceros, wildebeest, zebra and gazelles. It is also the location of the Ngorongoro Crater, the world’s largest inactive volcanic crater.

Dr. Major said: “The students gained a great appreciation of Tanzania’s beauty, but also an acute understanding that if you venture just a little way from the tourism spots you can find some extremely serious public health issues. We were very impressed by their professionalism and compassion.”

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About Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar

Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar is a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. It offers a comprehensive six-year medical program leading to the Cornell University M.D. degree with teaching by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty and by physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Aspetar Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, the Primary Health Care Corporation, the Feto Maternal Center, and the Sidra Medical and Research Center who hold Weill Cornell appointments. Through its biomedical research program, WCM-Q is building a sustainable research community in Qatar while advancing basic science and clinical research. Through its medical college, WCM-Q seeks to provide the finest education possible for medical students, to improve health care both now and for future generations, and to provide high quality health care to the Qatari population.

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