

Medical Student Enrichment Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Mutengene, Cameroon - Baptist Hospital Mutengene

Dates of Training: January 29, 2018 to February 25, 2018

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My experience in Cameroon was unforgettable. I traveled to Mutengene, Cameroon with another medical school classmate. We are both going into OB/GYN. When we arrived, we were in a bit of a culture shock but got acclimated thanks to Dr. Dionne-Odom. She is an infectious disease doctor at UAB, and travels to Cameroon every three months for an on-going research project (picture 1). The unfamiliarity of the country and new hospital was anxiety provoking. I had no idea of what the airport looked like, what the hospital is like, what our rooms would look like, etc., so having Dr. Dionne-Odom show us around for the first week was really comforting.



Our very first morning we were introduced to the entire hospital staff at the church service. Then, we briefly met the doctors of the hospital. There are three orthopedic surgeons, two general surgeons, and an Ob/Gyn who was away on vacation for the next two weeks. Therefore, we worked with the general surgeons and

participated in more than just Ob/Gyn surgeries. We learned quickly how much autonomy we had. I first-assisted in surgeries, such as a myomectomy, tubal exploration, total abdominal hysterectomy, and c-section.

The hospital staff are so nice and friendly that we made friends quickly. We were invited to accompany a nurse midwife (Anthony), a pharmacy tech (Divine), and a few others to a nearby beach town called Limbe to eat fish, and then to a private beach called Simme Beach (picture 2). The sand is black, volcanic sand. We had a fun day swimming, playing volleyball, and soccer on the beach.

I practiced multiple cervical exams and because of that I am more comfortable with measuring dilation and effacement. I also delivered babies via normal spontaneous vaginal deliveries with the help of the nurse midwives (picture 3). One of our favorite pass times was going to the market on market days (Mon, Wed, Sat) and buying authentic, colorful fabrics. Our housekeeper's husband is a tailor so he made us very beautiful clothes from the fabric we bought as souvenirs (picture 4).

Moreover, I worked on my quality improvement project. The high maternal mortality rate in Cameroon compared to the US is astonishing. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Society of Anesthesiologists developed the Maternal Quality Improvement Program. The program focuses on better medical documentation so that the information surrounding a maternal death is less of a narrative form and more a set of discrete data elements. They developed a data dictionary, and I used it to create a new maternal death form for the hospital. I want the hospital to have a better form, so that it will be easier to analyze the data surrounding the maternal death.

During my third week, we traveled to a nearby town, Beau, to visit the regional public health department and meet with the person in charge of maternal death review surveillance and review. She gave me an overview of how it works. During our fourth week we got a tour of a government hospital in the town of Limbe.

The best part of my experience was the autonomy and responsibility we were afforded in patient care. This gave me confidence which will carry over into my intern year. The next best part was our friends we made. The people really opened up to us and made us feel welcome. I still keep in touch with these friends through whatsapp because I hope to return one day.

Joana Hubickey