

Medical Student Enrichment Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Mwanza, Tanzania – Bugando Medical Centre

Dates of Training: January 29, 2019 – February 29, 2019

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Bugando Medical Centre is perched on top of the largest of the many hills surrounding the town of Mwanza, overlooking the city and the vast sweep of Lake Victoria that stretches to the north, beyond the horizon. Bugando is a 950+ bed tertiary referral center founded by the Catholic Church that currently functions as one of Tanzania's largest medical centers and houses a large medical training program, the Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (CUHAS). There are approximately 1,000 medical students at CUHAS (spread over a five year curriculum), as well as nursing and dental students, students in the basic sciences, and researchers. It is a busy place that cares for some of the sickest patients in East Africa.

Every day I walked to the hospital from my apartment several blocks away, filed through a hospital security gate, and crossed the large hospital courtyard to enter the white and blue concrete buildings of the medical facility. Since I am doing a combined specialty, my time at Bugando was split evenly between rounding on inpatient pediatrics and internal medicine services, and the flow of my day varied depending on where I was in the hospital.

During my two weeks in Pediatrics, I started my days by attending a brief morning report that consisted of the resident and intern who were on call summarizing the overnight admissions, discussing complex cases they encountered, and detailing what had happened in the cases of patients who had died. Afterwards there was a break for tea time with residents at the hospital canteen and then we proceeded to rounds.

I worked most closely with two pediatrics attendings, Dr. Respicious and Dr. Maimuna. Dr. Respicious works on Bugando's general pediatrics service and also attends in the pediatric ICU while Dr. Maimuna specializes in malnutrition and typically attends in the hospital's malnutrition



wards. Both were excellent teachers and were very enthusiastic about explaining pathophysiology and patient management to me and the handful of other Americans (mostly residents) who were also rotating at Bugando. My work ranged from simply participating in rounds and attending impromptu lectures given by attendings, to weighing in on physical exam findings and treatment plans, to assisting with patient care in the ICU. I also spent some days with sub-specialists. One of the most interesting of these was getting to work with a pediatric cardiologist, Dr. Glory, in the echo suite, where she diagnosed congenital heart defects and walked me through each of the various lesions we visualized.



One of Bugando's Internal Medicine wards

My weeks in Internal Medicine followed a similar structure, with the main distinction being that I was able to participate in morning reports that were student oriented. Each morning one of the Tanzanian medical students would present a patient who was a new admission and then field questions from students, residents, and attendings who were in the room. Unlike the morning reports on peds, these meetings could last up to an hour. After morning report we had tea time, like on peds, and then would round. I spent most of my time on general medicine but also spent time on subspecialty rounds and in Bugando's ICU.

My afternoons generally looked similar regardless of whether I was on medicine or peds. After going back home to eat lunch, I would typically return to the hospital for scheduled lectures that residents were giving or to examine additional patients and follow up with patients from rounds. I would also spend time reviewing papers for a research project on arboviral infections that some of the attendings at Bugando were working on.

My time in Mwanza was extremely valuable on many levels. Perhaps the most immediate of these was the opportunity to gain exposure to diseases and presentations of diseases that are far less commonly encountered in the United States. Some of these included patients in profound states of malnutrition, a case of tetanus, bacterial meningitis, toxic ingestions from herbal medicines, parasitic infections such as schistosomiasis, and many diseases seen in the US but at very late stages of presentation (diabetes, congenital heart defects, and gastric cancer among others).

At the end of the day though, it isn't the interesting cases that I saw that will prove to be what I am most grateful for about this trip. Most rewarding of all was the way my time at Bugando afforded me with the opportunity to learn more about and reflect on the complexities of working cross-culturally in a medical setting and to make friendships with Tanzanian students. It is



extraordinarily easy for westerners to enter a majority world context with the mentality that we have all of the answers because we have more material resources – an approach that is a recipe for fractured relationships, burnout, and shallow “interventions” that affect no real change or even make things worse. I am extremely grateful for the example of my primary mentor in Mwanza, Rob Peck, a Med-Peds trained physician who works full time at Bugando. He has lived in Mwanza for over ten years, helping develop CUHAS’ medical school curriculum. However, his work has encompassed far more than merely offering American expertise. He has also worked tirelessly to learn Swahili, understand the culture and history of Tanzania, and build strong relationships with his colleagues, which involves more than just work activities and research; this also includes things like serving on wedding committees and other non-medical commitments.

Bugando Medical Centre overlooking Lake Victoria

Ultimately, my time in Tanzania has excited me about the prospects of continuing to work in global health in the future and helped me envision ways that I could make this possible. Doing successful global health work is much more of a marathon than a sprint, and I am so thankful for this opportunity from UAB to continue the long work of reflection and learning that are required to do it well.

Wilson Ricketts



Trip to Ukerewe (largest island in Lake Victoria)