

Roxanna Pourkarimi, Ghana (Accra and Asesewa), 16th August – 13th September 2013

This summer I spent a little over three weeks in Ghana: one week working with the charity African Gifted Foundation, a summer course for gifted teenagers brought together from across Africa, and another couple of weeks working at Asesewa Government Hospital.

The first ten days that I spent in Ghana were in the capital city of Accra, volunteering with the African Gifted Foundation with a few other Cambridge students. The AGF provides a science and technology-based summer school programme for selected gifted African students from a phenomenal range of cultural and economic backgrounds, and my role as a volunteer was essentially that of a general leader and teaching assistant, responsible for the welfare of my group of students and for organising extra-curricular activities and events. Although, as a medical student, my main goal in visiting Ghana had been to gain experience working in the Ghanaian hospitals, I had underestimated how valuable the experience of volunteering with the AGF would be to me. Meeting such bright and motivated children not much younger than me, from backgrounds so different to my own, was incredibly inspiring and had a profound effect upon the way that I consider my own goals and aspirations and my appreciation for the advantages and opportunities that I am presented with every day.

For the following two weeks I travelled to the Volta Region, to the town of Asesewa, where I had arranged through the organisation 'Elective Ghana' to gain some work experience in the local Asesewa Government Hospital. Although it was one of the largest hospitals in the region, working in this hospital of only three wards (men, women and children, and maternity) and two rarely-present doctors was a vastly different experience to anything I have encountered in the UK Health Service, and gave me an entirely different perspective on the practice of Medicine. Working with very primitive equipment, only the most basic of examination techniques, and occasionally not even running water, taught me a great deal about Medicine on a very basic level and forced me to take a more thoughtful and creative approach to treating patients with limited resources. Besides the invaluable experience of healthcare in a developing country, during my time at AGH I had many learning opportunities that are rarely available to a first year medical student: in my time there I conducted outpatient consultations independently, assisted in theatre and delivered babies, and learned a great deal in the process.

I am immensely grateful for the time that I spent in Ghana and everything that I learned there: professionally I gained a great deal of medical knowledge and experience that will be invaluable to me in my course and in future and my career, but besides that the Ghanaian culture and the people that I met also had a significant impact on me on a personal level, and made the entire trip an unforgettable experience. I would like to thank Pembroke College and the Peter Ringrose Africa Travel Scholarship for their generosity in supporting this venture.