

Summer Internship Report 2017

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**Wake Forest School of Medicine
(Dr. Clark Files)
Winston-Salem, North Carolina**

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

During my internship, I was fortunate to explore the connection between basic science research and patient care. My research was focused on investigating the relationship between DNA methylation and Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome. The mechanism and cause of ARDS has been in question for years, yet is crucial to understand, as many patients in the ICU suffer from its debilitating symptoms. I have gained an immense appreciation for clinical related research, as it provides results relevant to the pool of patients under the physician's care and the ability to move from lab bench to bedside is useful in providing answers directly to the patient and the patient's family. I also greatly enjoyed utilizing my knowledge of chemistry to aid in understanding my research and know that these newfound skills will be incredibly useful to me in the future.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

Not only did I learn new research skills, but I realized the importance of the physician-patient relationship. I learned how to effectively communicate with patients in order to allow them to maintain a sense of autonomy and dignity. I discovered a purpose for myself in medicine and am eager to gain more experience in the field.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

Frequently, patients in the ICU experience memory loss and confusion in regard to the sequence of events that occurred throughout their stay. While it is unlikely for these memories to return, the patient is usually updated on their experiences from their physician, friends, or family. To aid in alleviating any emotional trauma, a physician and medical student collaborated to propose an ICU Patient Support Network that would allow survivors of the ICU to meet with each other to discuss their experiences in the hospital as well as events leading up to or after their stay. During the meeting, a young man openly discussed his battle with drug addiction prior to his hospitalization and his discombobulated memories of the ICU. It was incredibly humbling to listen to his story and witness the gratification that he had toward the medical professionals who cared for him. He claimed that he was eager to share this story openly and honestly with other ICU survivors as it could potentially help them understand that their hospitalization does not define them. I was thankful that my work at Beersheba Springs Medical Clinic provided me with the communication skills to attentively listen to his story and respond empathetically.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

Although I have had clinical experience in the past, I came into this internship with minimal research experience. Though I was incredibly eager to begin researching, I had to rely on Dr. Files and other medical professionals to guide me through the process and be patient with the results. Clinical research requires a team of scientists and physicians alike, and it is common to fail half way through the experiment or not discover publishable findings. Researching in the pulmonology department allowed me to strengthen my teamwork skills, as I worked alongside others to discover interesting results.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

My experiences have provided me with such a sense of purpose and direction regarding my future. I can confidentially claim that I will strive for a future in medicine as a physician, and have been humbled by the intelligence, drive, and passion of the medical students and professionals that I have had the privilege to meet. I have fallen in love with medicine even more than I could have possibly imagined by being brave enough to ask questions, take on new experiences, and explore the field. I could not be more grateful for this incredible opportunity and am eager to continue pursuing my dream.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

My first patient encounter was unforgettable: an older man ridden with cancer looked at me with fire in his eyes as he laid helplessly in the hospital bed. I could tell that he was a strong, healthy man at one time in his life, and it was in that moment that I realized the importance of patient dignity. A situation such as this is an incredibly delicate one, as the patient fully relies on the medical professional to heal and provide them with comfort. As a curious student passionate about the beautiful connection of science and medicine, it is easy to get lost in the "case" and neglect the importance of empathy and compassion required to provide proper care. The patient not only relies on the physician for physical wellness, but emotional wellness, too. Although I cannot begin to say that I could relate to the pain that this man was feeling, I learned the importance of empathetic communication and making the patient feel comfortable at their most vulnerable moments.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

The best piece of advice that I can provide you with is to be brave and never be discouraged from asking questions. You will be challenged, you will make mistakes, and you might even get lost in the hospital, but this is a once in a lifetime experience. Take it all in.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

I cannot begin to say how grateful I am for this wonderful experience. I have completely fallen in love with Wake Forest and am eager to see what the future holds. I have learned an immense amount about what it means to be a physician in every sense of the word. The work that I was able to participate in this summer was so inspiring, and I would not have been able to take on this opportunity without your generosity.