



## Professional Exchange Program IFMSA MEDSAR Rwanda

My internship took place in February 2016 in CHUB, a referral hospital in Huye, the second largest city of Rwanda. I was placed at the department of my first choice, internal medicine. Jean d'Amour, the NEO of MEDSAR, picked me up from the airport and brought me to Huye and showed me around. Huye is a really small city, there are 2 main streets with some shops and restaurants and there is a huge campus of the University of Rwanda. Most of the people who



live in Huye are students or business people, so a lot of people speak English. The hospital was located on the top of a hill, patients could walk in and out from the ward to get some fresh air and sunshine. My accommodation was in a hostel led by nuns, which was really close to the hospital. I had my own room and also other international students stayed over there.

### *A normal day*

In the morning I went to see my patients for a quick examination. At 7.30 all the students and doctors on the wards came together to talk about some cases that were introduced during the night. After that there was a grand round, where we went to see the new patients on the ward and after that we went back to our ward to examine our patients and to make a plan for the day. Around 11 o'clock, we went on a small round and we presented the patients. After lunch break there were lectures and after that I went to the ward again to see if the patients really got their medicines and treatment. I was surprised by how organised the days were, I didn't expect to have lectures and was happily surprised.



### *Goals*

Before I came I had set some goals to achieve. I wanted to take history, practice physical examination at least 6 times and wanted to talk with students about the healthcare system and insurance. Because I got my own patients, I practised the physical exam every day and learned about patient management. This was really useful and I got a lot of admiration for the doctors, because they were in charge for



more than 12 patients and I was only for 1 or 2. I learned how hard it is to take a proper history, especially with a language barrier.

## *Expectations*

Some of my expectations were totally different from what I experienced. I didn't expect Rwanda to be so full of hills and I also didn't expect the hospital to be so poorly equipped. To be a doctor is really hard under these circumstances. In most cases you deal with poverty first before you can treat the patient. Most of the patients are 90% insured, however 10% is already too much to afford in most cases. When you prescribe medicines, half of the time it's not given to the patient the next day for different reasons. The pharmacy of the hospital is always out of stock, so the patient has to buy the medicines in an outside pharmacy, where they have to pay 100% themselves. So medicines are not bought or not given by the nurses. This means there is an enormous delay of treatment, people are in the hospital for weeks, whereas in Holland people are only there for a couple of days.

What I also didn't expect was that there was so much delay to come to the hospital. A lot of local people use traditional medicines first to solve their problem. In the picture located on the right, a man sells traditional medicines and claims to have a machine that knows every disease you have. People told me that if they do a "check-up" like this, they don't need to go to the doctor anymore. If they don't get better with the traditional medicines, they go to a healthcare centre, where people work with a couple of months of healthcare education and most of the time the patients go home with antimalarial treatment. If the symptoms get worse, they finally go to a district hospital, but then there is already a lot of delay, so people get in with untreatable end stage diseases.



For me this internship was really useful. I learned about the culture of Rwanda, the history and got to know a lot of local students. The students and doctors really inspired me, lots of them are affected by the genocide and lost members of their family. They work really hard to help their patients, although they don't have all the means to do so. I really liked internal medicine, it learned so much about tropical diseases, neurology, psychiatry and nephrology. I would recommend everybody to go to Rwanda and I would suggest to make the internship bilateral, so that the Rwandan students can profit of our knowledge as well.