

Am I Home?

Presenter: Sara Foster Fabiano, MD

Author: Sara Foster Fabiano, MD



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

Goals and Objectives

- Name some of the barriers faced by physicians returning to lower resource settings who have trained in outside contexts.
- Discuss some of the emotional challenges practitioners face when involved in cross cultural situations.
- Reflect on a global elective and the role of learner vs teacher/contributor.

Why Discuss This?

- Medical education and training are becoming more globalized and medical practitioners and students will begin to find themselves involved in cross cultural contexts more and more (Haq, et al.).
- Not only are practitioners serving in other settings but often trainees from diverse locations are training in a context that is often quite different from their original (Bodnar, et al.).
- This is a personal reflection on working internationally while also being from an international context and how culture and training can shape experience.

Setting the Stage



Setting the Stage

- The air was humid and warm - the tarmac wet. The terminal - alive with light and color - everything surrounding was dark with the occasional flash of lightning in the distance highlighting clouds and nearby storms. I couldn't help but smile and wanted to do something cliché like touch or kiss the tarmac to celebrate. Though there was still one leg of the journey left, I was in Namibia - as close to home as I'd been in almost 3 years.

- Having grown up in Angola, Africa with a Canadian-American mother and Angolan father (briefly before he passed in 1990), I was ready to begin my elective back in Angola as a third year resident confident that my background would make this experience all the better and allow me to be even more effective on this rotation. On the flight the next day, everything looked and sounded familiar but slightly altered - like trying to look through glasses with the wrong prescription.

- I had begun a journey which I had dreamed about throughout medical school and the beginning of residency - being able to return 'home' however I immediately felt out of context. What would this experience actually turn out to be? What did being home and trying to contribute actually mean?



Who am I?

- Angolan - Canadian - American missionary kid from Lubango, Angola, Africa
- My family have a long history of involvement in healthcare in Africa
- Exposure to a dysfunctional healthcare system in a warring country helped initiate my medical aspirations
- Started to interpret for medical students and residents early on



Getting the Training

- Undergrad at Furman University with summer medical volunteer trips to Angola in 2008 and 2010 with a travel study program in 2009 through the countries of Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana
- Medical school at Wake Forest University SOM with 2 months in my 4th yr spent in Angola for further community medicine exposure
- Family Medicine residency at the University of Colorado in the Denver Health or underserved track

Global Health Elective

- Working at CEML (Centro Evangelico de Medicina do Lubango)
- General medicine outpatient and inpatient time with several half sessions with an OB/Gyn and 2-3 days in the OR with the general surgeons



Why go Back?

- This was home - consistency in service
- Already had the language
- Childhood dream - going back had always been part of the reason I had done medical school
- Knew the context

Reflecting on the Time

- Familiar yet foreign
- Improved knowledge base didn't mean that I could step out of the role of learner
- All the protocols and algorithms that had been engrained from residency were not my saving grace

By the End...

- Comfort levels were beginning to be restored.
- Relationships were becoming more comfortable.
- Preceptors didn't expect me to save the world - just to learn
- Then time to go...

- The lingering question - when to go back? Would I go back?
- What would a real career in medicine in Angola look like?
- Had my aspirations been realistic or idealistic?



Pondering

- Part of my struggle - not just finances but comfort level - fear of having grown so accustomed to the 'other system' that I won't truly be able to feel comfortable anywhere else or always use what I've learned
- Are the many hours of training in a context so different from home part of the reason that many don't return?
- Are there ways to keep from feeling like the outsider if you're in multiple contexts?

Developing thoughts

- Stay connected
- Be consistent
- More cross cultural opportunities and interactions may make us more comfortable and open to the unfamiliar
- Be open to not fitting the mold

Summary

- Barriers - finances, different systems and protocols, not being able to use training in the same way
- Emotional challenges - feeling like the outsider, how to embrace it
- Learner or Teacher - be open to both and willing to participate on both levels

References

- <https://msu.edu/~williss2/carpentier/part4/angola.html>
- Bodnar, B. E., Claassen, C. W., Solomon, J., Mayanja-Kizza, H., & Rastegar, A. (2015). The Effect of a Bidirectional Exchange on Faculty and Institutional Development in a Global Health Collaboration. *PLoS ONE*, 10(3), e0119798. <http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0119798>
- Haq, C., Rothenberg, D., Gjerde, C., Bobula, J., Wilson, C., Bickley, L., Cardelle, A., Joseph, A. (2000). New world views: preparing physicians in training for global health work. *Family Medicine*, 32(8), 566-572. Retrieved August 15, 2017, from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/James_Bobula/publication/12320437_New_world_views_Preparing_physicians_in_training_for_global_health_work/links/02e7e51d2f99b62146000000/New-world-views-Preparing-physicians-in-training-for-global-health-work.pdf.
- Pichugin AA., Sadigh M3., Sadigh M4., Ziganshin AU2., Ziganshin BA1., Ziganshina AP2., Yausheva LM2. Young Russian Physicians in Uganda: A Unique Program for Introducing Global Health Education in Russia. *Ann Glob Health*. 2015 Sep-Oct;81(5):627-35. doi: 10.1016/j.aogh.2015.10.007. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27036719>.
- Sivakumaran, L., Ayinde, T., Hamadini, F., Meterissian, S., Razek, T., Puckrin, R., ... Deckelbaum, D. L. (2016). Support infrastructure available to Canadian residents completing post-graduate global health electives: current state and future directions. *Canadian Medical Education Journal*, 7(3), e41–e50. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5342887/#>.