

## **Reflection paper**

My name is Venansa Ngwar, I am a student at Montgomery College, majoring in Lifesciences. My goal is to get to Medical school and become a medical doctor. On January 12<sup>th</sup> during the winter break until the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, I was fortunate to have an opportunity to be a participant on the Study Abroad program to Ethiopia as a scholar. As an aspiring physician, this program gave me insight into how health care and the education of health is approached internationally, especially in developing countries.

I travelled with a great team coordinated by Dr. Greg Malveaux and I got to learn about health care and health education by visiting local elementary schools, the University of Gondar which is located in the City of Gondar in Ethiopia, I visited Gondar Medical school, attended health conferences and discussed with health care professionals about the aspects of the education of health and health care in Ethiopia.

As a result of visiting these sites and asking several questions, I got to learn that Ethiopia has great programs which involve educating students and the community about health. An example of such programs would be Health extension programs. Health extension programs provide a platform to teach the communities about general health concepts such as hygiene and sanitation, vaccination, and transmissible diseases. Post graduate health students are the health personnels participating in these programs and serving the communities. In this program a health personnel is assigned to about 8 homes by the government, so as to educate the people about health. These health personnels are to visit these homes at least twice a month as I was informed when I visited the medical school in Gondar.

Furthermore, I was informed that exchange programs exist wherein teachers and professors from developed countries come to Ethiopia to learn about how students are being taught, and then contribute to improving the education system by giving teachers and other educators guidelines which they believe would lead to better education of the students. This applies to all subject categories including health. In addition, I was informed during conferences that collaborations are to be made wherein, students who have proved academic excellence would be sent to developed countries where they would learn new things, get back to their communities and improve the lifestyles of their people.

Although my main focus was to learn about health care and health education in Ethiopia, I carried out other activities with my team mates, visited so many sites and participated in a Festival. We visited a castle, where I learned a brief history about Ethiopia; we also visited the museums where I saw wonderful paintings and sculptures. We also participated in the Timkat festival which was one of the most interesting parts of the trip. The Timkat festival is a three day event that commemorates the baptism of Jesus Christ in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. During the festival, the streets were closed, people stayed up all night worshipping until sunrise, there was music and chanting and so much joy.

I would have to say this Festival was one of my favorite moments in this trip, not only because of the music and dancing which I loved, but because I got a feel of what a true community is like, and faith. A faith so strong that people are willing to chant all day, stay up all night praying without sitting down, some going without eating for days so that at the end they would get a touch of Holy water believing in blessings to come. I have never seen such a thing in my life. I have never seen such devotion. It made me

think about my own beliefs not only religion but other aspects of life. My belief in my goal to save lives through health care, serve my community, make society better. It made me think that if I believe that what I want to do will come to pass then I would receive the motivation I need and I would be able to push myself to get there. I say so because sometimes life hits me so hard and I wonder if going after your dreams is worth it, but after going through this trip I am coming to realize that the faith in the possibility of my dreams becoming a reality would push me to do what I have to do so as to get there.

I also got to learn more about collaborating with my team mates and making good friendships with them. During the course of the trip I came to learn that we are so different from one another and we all have good hearts and all want to learn. It was interesting getting to watch my team mates face some of the challenges they faced or if I may say less luxury such as cold showers, long walks, and how they handled personality differences. I came to learn the importance of respectful communication when addressing issues with one another and the importance of knowing that it is always good to think of the whole rather than of one.

This trip gave me some understanding into how health care is approached internationally especially in developing countries. I got to learn about what being a community is like and how to collaborate and work in team. The people of Ethiopia were so hospitable and welcoming. I ate great food, and danced to wonderful music. I made many friends, and the faculties were like our parents- very nurturing. I would like do this again and I know it would be for a longer period of time.

I would like to thank Dr Malveaux Greg, Dr Solomon Clemmie and all the participants of this trip for making sure that this experience was a wonderful one for all of

us. This was a once in lifetime opportunity and I would have to say it has changed my way of seeing people and approaching my goals. Thank you very much.