

**Jennifer Coats:** My experiences in Cape Town, South Africa started with Child Family Health International ([www.cfhi.org](http://www.cfhi.org)), a non-governmental organization with service-learning projects in several countries. I was one of 16 pre-medical students in this particular program. CFHI coordinated our homestays with local Muslim families, they set up our rotations at health clinics and they also developed and suggested certain extracurricular activities (visiting Robben Island, climbing table mountain, various dance performances). I spent four incredible weeks, and I still find it hard to do justice in words to the amazing things I learned from the family I stayed with, the other students in the program, the doctors and nurses at the hospitals, and the team of South Africans that met with me, guided me, instructed me and supported me throughout all of my adventures.

South Africa is one of the most diverse places imaginable, both geographically and culturally. It proudly boasts its motto of “the Rainbow Nation” and the fact that it is the richest country in Africa. However, income is hugely stratified across racial lines, and the country is still recovering from the minority rule and apartheid that only recently ended (1994). This social fabric of South Africa has many health care implications. As a pre-medical student, my intentions upon going to Cape Town were to serve and to learn about these implications. I worked in two “day clinics,” a larger urban hospital, and also went on rotation with paramedics. At the two day clinics I primarily worked in what were known as “Injection Rooms.” After patients were seen by physicians they would go to the injection room for treatment or various tests. I drew blood, administered certain medications, set up breathing treatments, took EKGs, and many other tasks. My time spent in the larger, secondary hospital involved shadowing doctors, “scrubbing in” to surgeries and actually prepping patients in the ER before they were seen by doctors. With the paramedics I was able to get an extremely close view of the logistical problems in treating so many people with such limited resources. Although there were numerous well trained paramedics for each region, the unmapped townships and the lack of any tracking technology made it quite difficult to actually reach and treat all of the people in need.

Indeed, a month in Cape Town was not nearly enough time; the full implications of everything I saw and learned were incredibly complex, but I’d like to think that at least I came home with an appreciation of the bigger picture. I definitely came home with an appreciation of the city, the country, and the society. It was an incredible and eye-opening experience, and I definitely see myself returning during medical school as part of an externship or a clinical rotation abroad.