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Visitor's perspective of Patan Hospital, Patan Academy of Health Sciences, Nepal

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A local man sits on the pavement in Patan Durbar Square at one am. A taxi driver calls a cell phone number I handed to him that belongs to the guesthouse I am staying at. Both of them are strangers to me, but go out of the way to make sure I reach home safe. It struck a chord, nice warm people and very hospitable. The next morning begins with meeting Mr. Shakya, the person in charge of visitors at Patan hospital, touring the hospital, including the outpatient department, emergency room, wards, auditorium, and medical school. I'm greeted with Namaste, and introduced as "tyo America ma doctor ho". This is followed by a most important visit to the cafeteria. We go over the menu. I am told the most popular options and also advice to not order 'jawanoko jhol' (for nursing females only, helps let down), I am told this will be explained soon in private. Curiosity grew. This hospital tour has surprised me because what I had in mind was a hospital with few rooms with barely any equipment. On the contrary, Patan hospital is fairly well equipped and organized with a CT scanner, multiple wards, and the medical school has an extensive public health department. Meanwhile I am offered a tea and biscuit everywhere. My first few hours of touring showed me that this is going to be a fun experience. This is followed by a stop at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) where I will be on rotation for the next few weeks. Another cup of tea and biscuit follows, fourth of the day already.

Day one starts in ICU with meeting medical officers, staff, patients and nurses. Talking to patients helps me learn their perspective. It is quick mixing up with medical officers through lunch strolls, breaks. Our lunch discussions are very interesting, sharing our knowledge and experiences about our culture and educational system. What struck me then is I read and hear so much about what visitors have to say and how extraordinarily helpful this experience has been in shaping their career.¹ But I wonder what it's like for the local officers, what's the impact on the medical officers, residents and students. Is it helpful? Do they feel they learn something, positive or negative impact? Or is it a source of brain drain?

Talking to the local officers, they say that they get to learn a lot from the visitors, be it latest evidence or latest techniques. However, I do think that this is biased. It has taken a lot of global health visits to understand the concept of sustainable development. Capacity building is very important. And that's what is sustainable. I am amazed by the knowledge and ability of the students, residents and officers at Patan hospital. What I could contribute is teachings I have acquired so far in internal medicine, nephrology and point of care ultrasound. I was frequently asked what could be improved at Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS)², and I would say that there isn't much that PAHS needs specifically but overall Nepal, like other developing nations, needs organization, government support, and infrastructure improvement. PAHS is doing well from an academic stand point, where every day I learned something new. I would carry a small slip of paper and it would be filled by the end of the day of things to look up.

Another valuable lesson was meeting staff with diverse experiences, be it growing up in a remote area in Nepal and working hard to become a staff physician at PAHS or being born and raised half way across the globe and coming to Nepal for medical volunteer work and then never leaving. There is something in Nepal that brings you back. I read testimonials by many physicians and some of them said it's the air, it's the mountains. Being back in Rochester, my program director asked me what is the one thing that you think you benefited most from – and I think it's the people. And I stand by it today, never have I met such warm people. I think it's the Nepali people that bring visitors back.

What I would recommend visitors is to bask in all that you can, all the time you spend at this beautiful place. Perhaps get in touch with Mr. Shakya prior to your visit and coordinate where your department of interest is. I was interested in teaching learning; one of the most important aspects of my visit was daily morning report and grand rounds. Participation in the rounds by preparing a presentation can be very fruitful. Making use of PAHS medical journal was also helpful, to understand the epidemiological pattern of disease in Patan and in Nepal.

This rotation was an enriching experience not only because of all the cases I saw and the teaching learning I participated in, but most importantly because of the relationships I built with the locals.

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