

Clendening Summer Fellowship Proposal
Hannah Anderson
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Introduction:

My goal for the summer is to learn how women's health care is administered in the setting of a constantly expanding refugee camp. My plan is to spend 4-5 weeks in Mafraq, Jordan, working alongside doctors in the Zaatari refugee camp for displaced Syrians. I will spend the time leading up to my trip refreshing my Arabic skills so that I can better communicate while in Jordan, and better understand the situation of women in refugee camps.

Background:

Before I was born, my parents, a doctor and a nurse, had already decided that they were going to spend their lives working among underserved populations overseas. By the time I graduated from high school, I had lived in six different countries on four continents. Growing up, I was often at my parents' sides helping them with the work they were doing. Sometimes I was in charge of mixing formula for malnourished babies, or cutting pills in half for patients, or organizing clothing donations. Sometimes I got to watch my dad do C-sections or give someone stitches. I got to see lots of interesting places. I went on safaris in Africa, toured the castles of Europe, and explored Roman ruins in the Middle East. I went to school with kids from all around the world and learned fascinating things about their cultures. But in the end, after all the adventures and all the beautiful sites, after all the excitement of travelling, I found myself carrying an awful burden. I had seen a lot of human suffering, and I wanted to do something about it.

During my undergraduate years, my passion for humanitarian work began to become focused more specifically on women's health issues in the developing world. My parents moved to Kenya during this time, and began working with Somali refugees. I spent a couple of months with them, and began to learn about the dire consequences of a lack of healthcare before and during childbirth. There were far too many stories of young women from tiny villages who went into labor, did not make it to the hospital in time, and lost their lives as a result of a huge lack of resources and health education. It was these women who inspired me to pursue medicine as a career.

My interest in this summer project was sparked when I first heard that a huge refugee camp had been set up in the town of Mafraq, Jordan, the town I lived in for seven years—a humanitarian crisis had popped up in my own hometown. Though I have known many refugees, I have never spent time in a refugee camp. I began to wonder what it was like to be a pregnant woman in a refugee camp. I wondered how being in a situation of crisis would change how physicians provide health care to women. I wanted to know how the needs of the women would change, for instance, what health issues would arise simply from being under a greater amount of stress than the average person. Lastly, I wanted to know how medical care is organized and carried out in a situation in which there is a constant influx of people, and nothing is permanent.

Having studied journalism in college, I have learned and relearned the importance of clear communication. This is where the Arabic part of my project comes in. Though I spoke Arabic at a conversational level in high school, my language skills need some refreshing. I think that the better I can communicate with the people I am working with, the better I will be able to understand their situation. I want to be able to speak the same language that my patients will be speaking.

Description:

The first part of my project will take place in the United States. I want to prepare myself for my trip by studying Arabic. Within the next couple of weeks, I will begin meeting weekly with a foreign exchange student from Saudi Arabia. She is trying to learn English and will help me with my Arabic. Additionally, at the end of this semester, I will begin taking a once a week language class at the Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City. Lastly, beginning during spring break and continuing into the summer, I will spend time on my own working through reviewing the two semesters of Arabic I took in college. I will do this using my textbooks and the interactive software that came with them.

The second part of my project will take place in Jordan. I plan on leaving for Jordan the week of June 17th, and staying there for approximately 4-5 weeks. My time in Jordan will be spent just outside the town of Mafraq, a town of about 60,000 people, which is situated just south of the Syrian border.

There are currently 250,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimates that this number will be closer to 430,000 by the end of the year. The largest refugee camp for Syrians, Zaatari, is located 10 km to the east of Mafraq. While it is unclear the exact number of refugees currently residing in Zaatari, the camp was built to house 60,000 and is now overflowing. The majority of those in the camp are women and children, many of whom left husbands and fathers behind in Syria.

Several branches of the United Nations and multiple Jordanian and international NGOs are working together to run the camp, but the majority of the health care is being carried out by the Jordan Health Aid Society with the financial support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Together, the two entities run a 24 hour a day clinic within the camp. Each week, the clinic sees about 200 women for reproductive health issues.

I plan on spending 8 am to 4 pm 7 days a week working at the clinic alongside a full time gynecologist and several nurses. At the clinic, I will be able to assist with basic health check-ups for women as well as pre-natal care and births. After a baby is born, I will make follow up visits with staff members to the tent of the mother and baby to administer any necessary postnatal care or counseling. Because the health care system within Syria has been mostly nonfunctional over the last year due to violence, many pregnant women have not received adequate prenatal care. Therefore, their time at the clinic will be particularly important.

Additionally, because of the massive influx of refugees in the last few months, JHAS will be attempting to create at least two more clinics in the camp in the next year. These new clinics will focus specifically on reproductive health. I hope to be able to witness the process of setting up these new clinics.

Outside of the clinics, I plan on taking off two or three afternoons a week to spend time assisting with and learning about other medical projects in the camp. These will include vaccination drives, reproductive health education, and mental health care. Many women have been witness to and victims of acts of violence within the last few months. There are also many who have been sexually abused as the result of armed militants raiding their homes. One report I read about Syrian refugees in Lebanon said that doctors were seeing a lot of miscarriages that they thought were probably stress related. Therefore, mental health care will be an important part of their care within the camp. These projects are primarily carried out by the UNFPA and JHAS.

I hope that working with some of the larger medical projects-vaccination drives, etc, will help me to gain a perspective of the overall public health situation of the camp. Whereas I think my time in the clinic will help me to understand things from the viewpoint of individual patients. I will get to see women come to the clinic for the first time, receive care, and then follow up with them. I will be able to identify what the major struggles and needs are for patients, and also the difficulties health professionals face in trying to keep track of population health as well as individual patients. Lastly, I will be able to witness how the United Nations works with regional as well as international NGOs and individual volunteers to successfully (or unsuccessfully) care for the health needs tens of thousands of displaced people.

I plan on arriving back in the States around July 26th. Classes begin on July 31st this year. This will give me a few days to rest and prepare for my second year of medical school classes to start the following week.

Methods:

During the first part of my project, I will be meeting with a conversation partner who I met through KU's International Friends program. We will meet for a couple of hours once a week at my home or in a coffee shop. Beginning in May, I will be taking a once a week Arabic class at the Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City. My contacts there are the office manager and the Arabic teacher. I will also be studying on my own using textbooks and a software program that allows me to listen to conversations and vocabulary words, etc. My father, who is fluent in Jordanian Arabic, will be helping me as I study. We will meet several times a week during the month of June.

For the second part of my trip, I will need to buy a round trip airplane ticket to Amman (the capital of Jordan). Once I have a plane ticket and know the time and date I am arriving, I will make plans to get from the airport to Mafraq. I plan on either taking a taxi from the airport to Mafraq (approximately an hour drive), or being picked up by family friends.

In Mafraq, I will be living in the volunteer quarters at the Annoor Sanatorium for Chest Diseases. The hospital is a mission hospital with staff from around the world. The hospital is very secure and is surrounded by a tall fence with guards on duty 24/7. My contact there is the medical director of the hospital. The volunteer quarters have a small kitchen, so I will be able to cook my own food. There are grocery stores within walking distance of the hospital, so I will not have a problem purchasing food. The hospital is approximately 10 km from the Zaatari camp. Taxis are cheap and readily available in Mafraq, so I plan on taking a taxi to the camp each morning and back to the hospital each evening.

My primary contact in the camp, is the project coordinator for Jordan Health Aid Society. She has given me permission to spend time in the JHAS clinic as well as with other JHAS projects in the camp (reproductive health education, monitoring of child and baby weights, etc). Because JHAS is carrying out most of the medical projects implemented by UN organizations, I will also have access to these projects.

Lastly, I have family friends in Mafraq and in Amman with whom I am also in contact. They will be able to assist me in the case of medical emergency or anything else that could go wrong.

Budget:

Round trip Airfare: \$1600-\$1700

Visa to be purchased at airport: \$26

Housing: free, staying in volunteer quarters at a mission hospital

Food for four weeks: \$240

Transport to and from camp each day: \$100

Bibliography:

Web Sites:

UNHCR Jordan: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486566.html>

UNFPA Jordan: <http://jordan.unfpa.org/>

JHAS: <http://www.jordanhealthaid.org/> (use translate option to read in English)

Contacts:

Faten Altaweel, conversation partner

Sahla Bayazid, Arabic teacher, Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City

Nicola Dababneh, Project Coordinator, Jordan Health Aid Society

Dr. Jeremy Fowler, Medical Director, Annoor Sanatorium.

Mustafa Hussein, Service Manager, Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City

Dr. Timothy Myrick, mentor, Arabic tutor

Readings:

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