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**ISHAR Multicultural Women's Health Centre
Mirrabooka, Western Australia**

When I found out I got accepted to participate in a medical internship at Ishar Multicultural Women's Centre in Australia, I thought it would be the opportunity of a lifetime. I got to go back to Australia again, I received a \$1,500 grant from Saint Mary's Intercultural Learning Department and on top of that I was getting school credit for this experience. In my mind it was the ideal internship, but I never would have thought that it would open my eyes to cultural competency in medicine and the joy of working with multicultural women.

The Ishar staff consists of some of the most independent, intelligent, and empathetic women I have ever met. They're from all over the globe and they each bring something different to the Centre. From day one they have instilled the "Social Model" of health into my medical knowledge, which includes personal and social aspects of well-being. These women are confident in who they are, which enables them to empower the women who come to the Centre seeking help.

The Centre is the ultimate experience for a future medical student. I have worked with women from over 50 different backgrounds and I have realized that working with multicultural women is a more rewarding experience than I could have ever imagined. The multicultural women are so humble and generous.

On my first day at the Centre, they threw me right into a session with a loud, boisterous African social worker named Ruth. Ruth summoned me into the room calling, "Kat-leen, come." I could barely understand one word of her broken accent as she explained her personal refugee experience. After setting up, many oriental women and their babies started piling into the room. Sticking out like a sore thumb, a translator approached me and introduced herself. She asked me where I was from and I asked her likewise. She answered, "I'm originally from Burma, do you know where that is?" Embarrassed but curious, I replied that I did not know. After her explanation, I realized that I would be learning much more during this internship than I originally thought. After my conversation with the translator, I sat through the Burmese Women's Perinatal Support Program, which discussed topics such as self-confidence, communication, childcare, and nutrition. Although most of the information was directed towards refugees and women whose lives have been shattered, most of the concepts reminded me of the women's empowerment group, GLITTER, that I created at Saint Mary's College. The fundamental ideas like good communication and self-confidence are the core to the more complex issues that college women deal with daily. From day one, I was inspired.

I have also had the privilege of shadowing Donna, the Centre's midwife. With Donna, I was able to visit hospitals with expecting mothers, observe advising sessions, and visit post-natal mothers. I've learned an extensive amount about the pre-birth and post-birth processes and many of the minor complications that can occur. With Donna, I had the privilege of following a Burmese lady, Pa Shwe, throughout her pregnancy. Pa Shwe had a very difficult time becoming pregnant. I met her during my first week and as we were touring the nearest hospital, she felt light-headed from a lack of fluids in her system and passed out during the tour. Although body language was the only communication we understood between one another, I felt a connection with her as she showed me her bracelets while we waited for assistance. I saw Pa Shwe two more times at Ishar for check-ups with Donna and the doctor and on my last day, I had the privilege of visiting her home where I was able to hold her beautiful, healthy baby girl.

The best part of my experience has been shadowing the General Practitioner, Dr. Christine. Dr. Christine has been nothing but kind to me since I met her. As some doctors may have considered me a burden, Dr. Christine willingly took me under her wing. She explained in thorough detail every medical process and answered every single one of my questions with a smile. Considering Ishar is a women's only facility, the vast majority of patients came with gynecological and obstetrical concerns. I have been able to observe pap smears, removing polyps from the cervix, inserting/removing Implanon (a form of birth control), and mammograms. I've learned about many different types of contraception and also about intrauterine devices. From my time with Dr. Christine, she has opened my eyes to the OB/GYN field of medicine, which I would have never considered without Christine's passion and willingness to allow me to shadow under her.

I have shared in the pain of these multicultural women as they came to the doctor with uncertainty and fear. One example of these feelings involved an extremely worried Sudanese refugee that came to the Centre seeking help. The woman informed the translator that during her last pap smear in Sudan the doctor told her that she had "two growing tumors in her womb." Confused, Dr. Christine asked the woman more questions about how her last doctor came to know this information. Some information was lost in translation, but Dr. Christine had a hunch and went on to do the scheduled pap smear. Soon Dr. Christine found that this woman had two polyps on her cervix. She explained to the Sudanese woman about the harmless polyps and asked if she would like them removed. The woman said that she would like the polyps removed and Dr. Christine quickly snipped both polyps. The Sudanese woman was ecstatic about the removal of what she thought were tumors and she could not thank the doctor enough. This is just one example of what little information these women know about medical processes and the physiology of their bodies. This has heightened my desire to educate women about their bodies different medical processes. Dr. Christine has opened my eyes to the OB/GYN field of medicine, which I would have never considered without her passion and willingness to allow me to shadow under her.

Ishar is the ultimate experience for a prospective medical student. I have worked with women from over 50 different backgrounds and I have realized that working with multicultural women is a more rewarding experience than I could have ever imagined. I have learned to respect cultural and religious guidelines throughout my internship at Ishar and also about the refugee experience and the hardships most multicultural women have to endure. I believe that everyone going into a social field should immerse themselves in a diverse culture in order to breakdown stereotypes and learn first-hand about other cultures.