Pauline Harrington  
My Public Statement regarding Cape Town, South Africa

This summer I ventured to South Africa to indulge myself in this country’s healthcare system in order to learn as much as I could in a short 6 weeks. I first interned at the South African Christian Leadership Assembly, which is a non-profit organization that focuses on public health projects. More specifically, SACLA specializes in home-based care in Nyanga, a township on the outskirts of the city of Cape Town. Most of the home-based care patients suffer from chronic illnesses, diabetes, hypertension, cancer and TB being the most prevalent, so a large part of my internship was shadowing and assisting the nurses with checking patient’s vitals, such as blood pressure and blood sugar levels. Another large aspect of my internship with SACLA was preparing community integrated health workshops for the chronically ill and assisting the home-based care nurses with presenting them to the patient’s within the community. These workshops were focused solely on primary prevention for those who have yet to be diagnosed with a chronic disease, but also treatment and explaining healthy living for those who had already been diagnosed.

Unfortunately, my time at SACLA was short-lived because of a safety issue, so I was relocated to a health clinic in Retreat to continue my observations of South African health care and my education of their system. At my internship with Retreat Day Hospital I became a clinical observer and was able to interact with the doctors and nurses as well as have conversations with them about South Africa’s healthcare policies and get their personal opinions about their system. Through my internship with Retreat Day Hospital, I was able to observe nurses and doctors in multiple different departments, including ARV, Injections, Psychology, Trauma and Maternal Obstetric Unit. Rotating through these different departments widen my perspective of how the clinic functions when handling a variety of health circumstances.

After this experience, I really hope to take what I have learned about South African public health tendencies and healthcare policies and combine that with what I already know about these topics in America. In addition, I hope to assess the tendencies in both countries on a deeper level to gain a personal understanding of what flaws are within each system as well as the pros to be able to produce an ideal healthcare system for future communities all over the globe. Though I am obviously not a policy maker or do not yet hold the power to do this, I think it is valuable for me to keep this in mind when I eventually go into public health and nursing, which I plan to do after undergrad. Having both of these very different perspectives and experiences under my belt, I believe this will makes me a valuable employee within the
health field. I feel as though I will be able to bring innovative public health ideas and practices from my experiences in both countries in order to better address global health disparities.

In addition, my time in South Africa allowed me to develop and grow personally to an extent I would have never imagined. South Africa allowed me to be my best and most exciting self; not only in terms of the activities and fun things I did, but also in terms of my internship experiences. Some of the activities I did abroad, like shark cage diving and walking with lions, were things I would have never in my wildest dreams foresaw me doing. In addition, things like seeing a man’s head wound get cleaned and sutured by a nurse or seeing a live childbirth were also not experiences I was anticipating on this trip. That being said, all these opportunities led me to being a much more open-minded and experienced person in the most amazing way. Thinking back to these experiences, I wouldn’t trade them for the world.

After my summer in South Africa, I see the world much differently. I see the world as a place I wish to travel and explore, but also a place where I want to build mutual understanding with. I desire to travel but only in an appropriate way, which is with respect and an open mind in order to gain the most valuable perspectives.

-Pauline Harrington