



Perspective/Opinion

Adapting and Overcoming in Kigali

By Heloise Cheruvalath, M2 – 2022 Dr. Elaine Kohler Global Summer Research Scholar

Student doctor Cheruvalath spent four weeks in Kigali, Rwanda in July 2022 to advance a pilot and assessment of the Rwanda912 ambulance system.

Starting the Dr. Elaine Kohler Summer Global Research program, the image of Rwanda in my mind was that of a country strong enough to overcome the worst kind of adversity to build anew. Before we touched down in Kigali, I had spent weeks reading several books about the genocide, reconstruction, and firsthand accounts of what it cost to live through such a history. Once in Rwanda, this tenacity was evident inside and outside of [CHUK](#), the teaching hospital we partnered with for our research. Rwanda's resilience is reflected in the beautifully poignant Genocide Memorial, the remarkably clean roads, the sprawling natural parks, and the hospitals that take care of hundreds of thousands of people with limited resources.

In this spirit, if I had to describe in one word what I learned from our Rwandan partners and my mentor, Christopher Dodgion, MD, it would be "adaptability."

Ms. Christine, a charge nurse in the Accident and Emergency Department of CHUK, was one such exemplar of adaptability. As she helped us locate information for our research into data missingness, Ms. Christine explained how one of the major issues they see at CHUK and district hospitals with respect to traumatic injury is long wait times, scarcity of medical professionals, and limited beds for a large volume of patients. She also detailed some programs they have developed to deal with this, including a rigorous "red-yellow-green" triage system and having doctors rotating around smaller provincial hospitals. However, what truly struck me was her ever-present smile and can-do attitude towards caring for so many patients.

Going forward, building a new global partnership with CHUK was a lesson in adjusting to ever-changing situations. More so than actual data collection, I found the process of adjusting our research questions, dealing with delays with American and Rwandan Institutional Research Boards, watching Dr. Dodgion meet with several key stakeholders in a short period of time, and working with a time crunch to be incredibly informative.

Ultimately, my fellow Kohler scholar partner and I were able to get through about 1900 patients worth of data collection and analysis in just a few short days. This would not have been possible without our Rwandan partners and all our experiences in the weeks prior!

However, even beyond summer research, my experiences during my month in Rwanda were transformative. At Nyamirambo Women's Center, I was inspired by their organization by and for Rwandese women striving to train and employ people in the community to help them reach opportunities otherwise inaccessible to them. In Akagera National Park, rangers taught us about Rwanda's massive effort to restore and save the land that was devastated by the genocide and ensuing refugee housing crisis. At Kigali's Genocide Memorial, I learned about the incredible spirit of the Rwandan people in building back better and stronger against seemingly insurmountable odds.

For all these opportunities, I am incredibly grateful towards the Wm. Collins Kohler Foundation, the MCW Office of Global Health and its Dr. Elaine Kohler Summer Academy of Global Research program. I will strive as a medical student and future physician to embody the values of perseverance and adaptability that defined my summer experience.

For further reading:

Review Heloise's global collaborative research [presentation](#) and [abstract](#) with mentor, Dr. Chris Dodgion, Trauma and Critical Care Surgery.

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