

Executive Summary

The Iowa Medical Society Foundation (IMSF) has provided 19 scholarships for University of Iowa (11) and Des Moines University (8) medical students for funding of their Global Health Clerkships. This scholarship supports students whose experience relates to health education and promotion, enhances the delivery of quality care, or improves the public's perception of medicine in medically underserved areas, both international and domestic.

Hannah Zipf, M1 of University of Iowa

Location: Lusaka, Zambia

Goals of trips:

- Gain a deeper understanding of international healthcare systems
- Advance knowledge of spina bifida and its clinical treatment through participating in neurosurgery rounds, observing surgical care, and collecting data on various research projects
- Gain experience and competence in various data collection, databases, and interpretation of research results
- Observe and model cultural humility through interactions



with the research team, physicians, and patients

- Enhance patient skillset by serving the local community of Lusaka Zambia and remain patient-oriented

The summer after her M1 year, she spent eight weeks in Lusaka, Zambia, alongside fellow medical student Layna. During her time there, she conducted research on spina bifida in partnership with University Teaching Hospital (UTH) and House of Hope. Her research focused on the relationship between anterior horn width and neurodevelopmental outcomes following hydrocephalus repair in patients with myelomeningocele (MMC), under the mentorship of Dr. Rebecca Reynolds, a pediatric neurosurgeon at the University of Iowa.

Her experience also gave her a firsthand look at the challenges of accessing healthcare in Zambia. While the Ministry of Health works to provide care as close to families as possible, Zambia's dispersed population, financial barriers, limited medications, and travel distances can make consistent care difficult. These challenges were particularly apparent for the MMC patients she worked with, who require ongoing follow-up at UTH. House of Hope played an important role by providing mothers with lodging and support they otherwise could not afford.



One of the most meaningful parts of the experience was immersing herself in a culture and healthcare system very different from her own. Seeing the hospital operate, including its reliance on paper medical records, gave her a greater appreciation for the resources available in the United States. She also valued experiencing local traditions, food, and daily life while building relationships with people in the community.

The experience was not without challenges. Homesickness, time differences, limited activities, and adjusting to a different culture required flexibility and patience. A particularly memorable challenge came during the rainy season, when plentiful harvests meant many patients did not attend their scheduled follow-up appointments. As a result, some days at House of Hope were unexpectedly quiet. She found that being comfortable with flexibility and downtime was essential to making the most of the experience.

Overall, the eight weeks in Zambia were both enlightening and personally stretching. She returned home with a deeper understanding of spina bifida, research, and the realities of healthcare access, but also with important personal lessons. The experience helped her become more caring, understanding, and adaptable and reinforced the importance of clear communication, cultural awareness, and making the best use of available resources as a future physician.

