

Nikita Kohli

School of Medicine, 1st Year

Center for Global Health (CGH) Summary of Activities

Introduction:

This past summer, I traveled to Thohoyandou, Limpopo Province South Africa along with a scholar from the University of Virginia at Wise, Spencer Adams, to conduct research with the Malnutrition and Enteric Disease (MAL-ED) project. The MAL-ED project is a five-year, multi-site, longitudinal cohort study designed to assess the relationship between malnutrition and infectious diseases. The goals of our involvement were threefold. First, we prepared international Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on aspects of the project unique to the South Africa project site. Second, we analyzed the prevalence of maternal depression and potential correlation with child malnutrition as defined by low height-for-age and weight-for-age. This involved both a preliminary literature review and analysis of data on 50 mothers. Third, we conducted the preliminary planning of a MAL-ED Community Engagement fair.

Research Objectives:

In order to develop internal SOPs, Spencer and I traveled with the fieldworkers to the local communities and observed the conducting of enrollment procedures, household surveillance surveys, food security questionnaires, and monthly assessments. We also observed and in some cases provided minimal assistance during the collection of blood, urine, and stool samples. We interviewed the fieldworkers regarding location of materials, modes of transportation to the sites, and scheduling protocols. For example, the fieldworkers utilized a matrix that instructed them when each child was due for a twice-weekly surveillance or a blood sample, which was conducted every three months. These procedures were then codified and written to provide an accounting mechanism for the study. As this is the first time South Africa has conducted such an extensive survey, codifying these procedures were important for quality control purposes.

Our second goal involved an internal analysis of the South Africa site's data on maternal depression. Some of the other MAL-ED sites such as India, had reported high levels of depression as assessed by the SRQ-20 survey, a 20 question survey to assess depression. We found that rates of maternal depression were not statistically significant and there was no correlation with children's health status.

Finally, we assisted Vhonani Netschendam, the Director of Community Planning at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) in developing a program plan for the MAL-ED community engagement fair. Because the study is exceptionally long and involves extensive amounts of questioning, participant burn-out was a concern. A community engagement fair would re-iterate the importance of the participants' involvement in the study and ensure that they are engaged with the study objectives.

Reflections:

My involvement in the MAL-ED project provided administrative assistance in addition to early internal analysis of the data from the study. While there is an extensive team of fieldworkers, field research is not without its challenges, which included the extensive travel time from UNIVEN to the sites and the issue of participant burn-out addressed above. Because of their busy work schedules, our involvement enabled the reduction of that workload through the provision of necessary research support. Working with the incredibly talented team at UNIVEN was a privilege and I am pleased to have had the opportunity to contribute to this project.