

Elizabeth Kappler

Good Samaritan Health Center Medical Assistant Internship

Interim Report

Over the last seven weeks, I have been training as a medical assistant at the Good Samaritan Health Clinic in Atlanta, Georgia. This experience has exceeded my expectations and has helped me grow in my awareness of the world around me and in my capacity to serve as a healthcare provider.

Since childhood, I have dreamt of working in healthcare. As the child of international aid workers, I spent most of my developing years living in Central Asia. During that time, my younger brother suffered a traumatic injury which required immediate return to the USA where he received emergency surgery and, thankfully, made a complete recovery. That experience left a lasting impact on me as I was confronted with the awareness of healthcare disparities. I decided at that young age that I would pursue a career in medicine to help mitigate those difference. Now, as an undergraduate biomedical engineering student at the Georgia Institute of Technology, I am working towards my goal of attending medical school after graduation.

As part of my learning experiences, I sought out a clinical experience that would prepare me for a life in medicine. When I discovered the Good Samaritan Health Clinic and the work they do to provide quality healthcare to Atlanta's low-income communities, I was struck by the altruistic values and mission. As a 501(c)(3) organization, they strive to remove barriers to healthcare for the people who need it the most. They provide a full circle of health, offering medical and dental services, health education classes, and nutrition through a community farm, working to reverse the healthcare gap and mitigate social determinants of health. Since January, I have had the privilege of working with the Good Samaritan Health Center as part of the medical assistant internship program. This internship helps prepare individuals for a future in healthcare through valuable expose to clinical practice and training in skills necessary to be medical assistants, including understanding vital signs, taking patient histories, EKGs, and phlebotomy.

The first day of training, I learned how the active clinic environment requires quick thinking and rapid retention of information. After meeting a few of the full-time medical assistant team members, I was paired up with one of them to learn the basics of patient intake and how to use the electronic medical records system. Within the first few hours on the job, I was encouraged to bring a patient back on my own and successfully completed the patient intake, taking the patient's height, weight, blood pressure, pulse, and asking preliminary questions regarding their reason for visit and mental health. From the very beginning, I noticed how friendly the community at the clinic was. The medical assistants have a wonderful working relationship amongst themselves, with the providers, and most importantly, with the patients. Several times during that day, patients would burst into a grin upon seeing a medical assistant they knew personally and greet them by name. It was a testament to the impact this clinic has had on members of the community. Within the first week, I also learned how to keep the patient rooms clean and how to run simple laboratory tests including a urinalysis and microalbumin test.

Most jobs have a steep learning curve during the first month and the medical assistant internship was no different. I performed my first hemoglobin fingersticks on wiggling pediatric patients to check for anemia. Later that week, I performed a glucose fingerstick to check the blood sugar level of a recovering diabetic. About a month into my internship, I gave my first intramuscular birth control injection. I learned how an elevated white blood cell count on a urinalysis could suggest an infection. After observing multiple blood draws, I started learning the difference between a CMP (comprehensive metabolic panel) and a CBC (complete blood count).

It didn't stop. In my second month, I performed my first blood draw on a patient. While assisting a cardiologist, I became proficient in running a 12-lead EKG (electrocardiogram) and can now attach the electrodes without hesitation. With the help of the medical assistant staff, I was taught how to read lab results for a variety of conditions and called patients to give them good and bad news for the first time. Every single day brought a new challenge and a new lesson to learn. Every single day, I left the clinic so grateful for the opportunities I'd been given to learn as a member of such a supportive and encouraging team.

With unique opportunities comes unique challenges. Good Samaritan Health Clinic serves a large Hispanic population and my lack of Spanish ability became quickly apparent. While I can still take basic patient information for intake, I feel deeply sad when I cannot communicate freely with my patients. I am so thankful for the staff and providers who can and have since started learning basic words and phrases in Spanish and hope to continue learning as I pursue a career in medicine. Over Super bowl weekend, I was tasked with helping copy flyers for the homeless in Atlanta who were at risk of being arrested for living on the streets. It was eye-opening to realize the plight of so many that I normally would not have even known about. The most impactful experiences, however, were the times when my patients experienced pain. Unfortunately, sometimes procedures intended to help a patient, like blood draws and fingersticks, can cause hurt in the process. It was a glimpse of the heavy burden that healthcare providers carry as they seek to do no harm to their patients. I hope someday I can carry that responsibility well.

It has been a joy to be a member of the Good Samaritan team for the last seven weeks and I am so thrilled for the weeks to come. Good Samaritan Health Clinic is a tremendous model of a healthy and uplifting working environment and I look forward to getting to know the staff and providers even more. Thank you to Breanna Lathrop at the Good Samaritan Health Clinic and all the wonderful medical assistants for allowing me this opportunity and for steadily encouraging and correcting me as I learn and grow and thank you to Mr. Cohen and JJCF for supporting and enabling this opportunity.