

Interim Report for the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation

Dalton Price

Internship with the World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office

When looking for an internship for summer 2019, I chose not to apply for an internship with the World Health Organization (WHO) despite greatly admiring their work. They do not accept undergraduate interns, and many told me that an internship at the headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland could be unfulfilling due to the bureaucratic structure of the organization there. I expectedly continued my search for internships and was connected with someone in Qatar who works closely with the WHO. He highly recommended I work with WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO), which is based in Cairo, Egypt and does a variety of work in the Middle East and North Africa. He said that I would get great mentorship and that since the regional offices are often understaffed due to funding, I would be placed on an important project and have the opportunity to get my hands dirty while here. I heeded his recommendation and decided to pursue the internship with WHO EMRO. It was one of the best decisions I have made.

I was expectedly excited about the opportunity to work with the WHO – but I was also nervous. This is where I want to work in the future, so my self-set expectations were high. I needed to perform and impress to not only represent myself well, but also represent groups like the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation that are supporting me in this endeavor. Additionally, I have to travel to and live alone in Cairo for nearly four months. Cairo is an enormous city, and I knew no one. Though I have studied Arabic, I learned a different dialect – “shamy,” which is spoken in Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine – and didn't know how common English was here. I even had to ask what language was spoken in the office (fortunately it is English!).

However, my concerns were quickly assuaged upon arrival. At work I met so many incredible colleagues who quickly onboarded me and often invited me to iftar and suhoor, the two main meals during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. They were also major supporters in the office, offering to explain anything necessary to me. Language, though indeed a challenge, was not an issue. I have learned so much Arabic since being here and can communicate with people who speak no English at all! Last week I left my keys in an Uber driver's car and had to call him to meet up and get them back. He did not speak English; but I was actually able to communicate what I needed, and we met up less than an hour later. My colleagues at work also help me practice my Arabic, which has been immensely helpful. Coming from Cornell where the student body is so diverse, I was glad to also see a similar level of diversity in the workplace – meeting people from Kenya, Italy, UK, Nigeria, Bulgaria, France, and China all in the first week. Outside of work, I've been able to make some really incredible friends who have enriched this entire experience for me.



Photo at WHO EMRO where I work

Once arriving, I was surprised by how quickly I was put onto projects. They (fortunately) did not waste any time! One of my first and largest projects is the one I'm most excited to work on. It is called Tailoring Antimicrobial Resistance Programs (TAP) and is a detailed, step-by-step way to design public health programs addressing antimicrobial and antibiotic resistance. It builds upon methods of anthropology – notably interviews and participant observation – to wholly understand the local context in which we are working and then create programs out of this community-driven data. Too often, public health interventions do not consider local context to the extent necessary – and TAP does the exact opposite by integrating community voice at every step of the way. I am working on two TAP pilots: one in Jordan targeting physicians, and one in Sudan targeting pharmacists. And though very uncommon for interns to travel, I will be flying to Jordan in two weeks alone to implement this pilot program and work with the Jordanian Ministry of Health and WHO Country Office. I will give a presentation to over 30 physicians from three different health systems in Amman, Jordan's capital.

I am also working on a variety of other projects. World Antibiotic Awareness Week 2019 is happening in November, and as a regional office we must galvanize over 22 countries in the region and get them on-board with the effort. I have been designing social media kits, speaking with people all throughout the region, and creating a new collaboration with the Food & Agriculture Organization, another United Nations agency that will help our antibiotic resistance campaigns reach farmers and veterinarians in the region. Outside of this, I am writing a

comprehensive literature review of all behavior-change programs addressing antibiotic usage in the Middle East and North Africa and have written a series of clinical guidelines that will be distributed to clinicians in Jordan.

Before starting my internship, I knew that I was interested in international health, but I didn't know if I wanted to focus on medical anthropology or epidemiology. Though these fields work together, their work is very different. I wanted to use this summer to decide, and fortunately, after just five weeks, I have decided to pursue medical anthropology. This was a concern of mine, because at the end of the day I will be hired for a very particular skill (as compared to a broad-level understanding of multiple issues). There is a need to specialize in my industry, and I now feel comfortable starting that specialization process.

Outside of my internship, as mentioned, I've met some really incredible people from all over the world. My friends in Cairo are from Egypt, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Portugal, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, the Netherlands, and so many other countries. It has been great spending time with them and having a community in which I can confide and seek support whenever needed. Egypt also has a number of things to do. I've went to the pyramids in Giza, the Red Sea in El Gouna, the Mediterranean Sea in Alexandria and North Shore, the Sahara Desert in Siwa, and many other places. It is such a beautiful country that is so undervalued by Westerners. And importantly, the Middle East is absolutely the most misunderstood region of the world. People in the United States have numerous misunderstandings about safety, women's rights, freedom, and much more. It is absurd and leads people to ignore the absolute beauty of the region. I am glad to be in Egypt, glad to work with the WHO, and glad to have the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation's support.



Photo on top of a camel at the Great Pyramids of Giza and Egypt



Photo in a 4WD car driving through the Sahara Desert and taken nearby the Egypt-Libya border