

The WHO Life

Dear MSAI,

I want to talk about one of the biggest myths in medicine, and that is the idea that all we need are more medical breakthroughs to solve all our problems. Contrary to this dearly held belief of many medical students, it is the work of public health professionals that affects people every day in every part of the world. It addresses global issues that can affect the health of individuals, families, communities, and populations for generations to come. With the simple goal of looking past my tunnel vision, I set out to intern for the World Health Organization unit on the Global Coordination Mechanism for Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) from January to April 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland. During my internship here, I had the opportunity to get involved with many projects and even start some of my own. Here are a few of them.



Above: Bhavi as part of the WHO GCM/NCD Secretariat at the Member State Briefing for the Working Group 3.3 on Health Literacy and Health Education of NCDs.

IFMSA Delegate to the Executive Board Meeting

In addition to my internship, I was also an IFMSA delegate to the 140th Executive Board meeting. As a delegate, I developed IFMSA policy statements on various issues like Cancer Prevention and the NCD agenda for the High Level meeting in 2018. The statements were subsequently presented at the EB meeting. I also had the opportunity to meet with interesting people like the CEO of WONCA (World Organization of Family Doctors), with the rest of the delegation, to discuss possible collaborations between the two organizations and the Indian WHO attaché diplomat.

Working Group Member for the WHO-ITU Consultation on the Make Listening Safe Initiative

After expressing interest in Hearing Safety to the Department on Prevention of Blindness and Deafness, I was invited to participate in a two-day discussion on standards for safe listening, including discussions on exposure limits, communication strategies, and the new WHO Safe Listening app. I provided the user and youth perspective in discussions on user acceptability of the app, and I contributed to the discussion on exposure limits through my knowledge as a medical student. The Working Group comprised of people from all different industries; Apple, WHO, ITU, who are just a few who were part of the debates. I caught a glimpse of the lengthy discussions and thorough precision that goes into the development of WHO standards.

Working Group 3.3 on Health Literacy and Health Education of NCDs

The core of my work centered around the preparation and execution of the first meeting of the Working Group 3.3 on Health Literacy and Health Education of NCDs. I compiled research material, wrote background papers, and contacted relevant experts in the field to assist with the process. Aside from the in-depth knowledge I acquired on the topic, there was another unexpected but incredible benefit to this project. I had the opportunity to work with the world's leading professors in Health Literacy and after months of collaboration on the topic, other opportunities for further research presented itself.



WHO Bulletin Article — “How the Youth is Tackling NCDs- One Policy at a Time”

While many health reform strategies target the youth, they have been largely disregarded as agents for change in health. To challenge the status quo and bring to light the numerous contributions the youth have made in driving the health reform agenda, I wrote an article for the WHO Bulletin, titled “How the Next Generation is Tackling NCDs- One Policy at a Time”, which highlights the youth movement to combat NCDs. It is now in the pipeline for publication!

Knowledge of NCDs Survey

I developed a survey to test the knowledge of the WHO Headquarter Staff on NCDs. The idea grew out of my curiosity to know the extent to which the staff of the organization that sets the standards for health walked the talk. The survey is being distributed now and I am looking forward to interpretation of the results!



Above: Bhavi hosting the Expert for Intern talk

Intern Board as Academic Coordinator

I hosted the Experts for Interns (E4I) weekly seminars where I invited speakers from the WHO community and held the seminars so that interns have the opportunity to learn about the work of various experts within the Organization. Hosting the Expert for Intern talks has provided me with the opportunity to engage with global experts in the field, and to learn more about their career path and work at WHO. I have found that in such a diverse and fast paced organization, it is common for innovation and interesting projects to go unrecognized. Experts for Interns is the perfect platform to shed light on them, and to provide interns with a glimpse of WHO beyond our unit.

Conclusion

While the satisfaction of improving lives one person at a time is in itself a rewarding experience, I want to make a difference on a larger scale. I joined the WHO to be able to participate in making policies and guidelines that would impact the lives of millions of people, to learn about research and strategies employed to help people adapt to a better lifestyle, and to be able to utilise my knowledge and experience as part of a global community. I was honoured to have had this opportunity and it was truly an eye-opening journey — an experience that I firmly believe all medical students should have.



Above: Presenting the Knowledge of NCDs Survey

Below: (Left) Bhavi manages to take a cheeky snap at the empty table reserved for the Director General - WHO (Right) A glimpse of the WHO Executive Board Meeting

