

Midpoint: Mongolian Health Initiative

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I am at the halfway point of my internship and can confidently say that this internship has challenged and grown my perspectives and research abilities like never before. My learning objectives for this internship were:

1. Obtain knowledge regarding breast cancer risk factors in rural and urban regions
2. Obtain knowledge regarding tuberculosis infection in school-aged children, particularly in high-risk nations
3. Learn and apply relevant research methodologies, and gain practical research skills

4. Gain exposure to clinical research trials, and understand the protocol and methods that it requires
5. Gain personal applications on what it means to be a woman leader in the STEM fields

I have definitely progressed in these objectives, the first two mostly during my conversations with Mongolian Health Initiative (MHI) researchers. These conversations have been some of the highlights of my internship, as it has given me both a general and specific look at the public health issues facing Mongolia today, and what MHI is doing about them. In my day-to-day responsibilities, I have grown most in the last three objectives. I have found that, on the daily, research is less about the big issue (though it is certainly important to always keep it in mind), and much more about the small tasks. I have been able to monitor my progress and growth by a) the incredible amount of information I have gained regarding Mongolian public health issues, b) the methods and research skills I have gained, particularly in the area of biostatistics and data analysis, and c) the perspectives on being a woman leader in the STEM fields I have gained through my conversations with the incredible female researchers and role models at MHI.

I am currently working on a research article on Vitamin D concentrations in pregnant women, which has required a great deal of data analysis. As I've not yet taken biostatistics, these analyses were challenging and oftentimes frustrating to interpret, but I am proud of powering through and asking for help when necessary. In working on this project, I have learned that research is not just about doing the work itself, but so much more about figuring out how to do the work. This is something that I didn't realize was such a big part of researchers' work, and something that I feel I have been able to grow in through this internship. Through this internship, I have learned that it is important to remain humble, and that being teachable is a sign of strength, not weakness, because teachable people have a greater capacity to learn and improve.

This internship has helped me develop as a female leader by allowing me to be in an environment filled with incredible women researchers, as well as by working on a project that directly impacts women's lives. This has given me incredible perspective on how significant it is to be a woman working empowering other women through healthcare – something that I hadn't realized I was passionate about until put into an environment where I was able to help in projects that are doing just that.

I am building research and data analysis skills through this internship that will directly help me in my hope to further pursue medical and public health research, as well as research in my college academics. I have also learned a great deal about taking the initiative and networking within a professional community, which is undoubtedly relevant in both academia and in a medical center (where I hope to work in the future). All in all, this internship has taught me and challenged me a great deal, and I have been very thankful for this opportunity.