

James Rennie Bequest Report

During the summer of 2026, I spent June in Arusha, Tanzania, undertaking an internship supported by the James Rennie Bequest Travel Fund. This placement was organised by myself alongside Intern Abroad HQ and provided me with the opportunity to gain insight into healthcare delivery within a diverse cultural context. As an Immunology student, this experience allowed me to observe healthcare practice and the application of treatments I have studied beyond the classroom and develop a broader understanding of global health challenges.

The internship consisted of two main components. The first involved time spent within the Mount Meru Regional Referral hospital in the pharmacy and laboratory where I observed and assisted with day-to-day operations and attended professional development seminars. One seminar focused on entrepreneurship within pharmacy, exploring how innovation and business principles can be used to improve healthcare access and service delivery. The second introduced a new pharmaceutical product being considered for implementation within hospitals, providing insight into how new medicines are evaluated and introduced into healthcare systems. These experiences exposed me to aspects of healthcare innovation, implementation and decision making that are not often encountered in undergraduate study. The second and most impactful part of my internship involved a community-based placement with WEHAF, the Widows Encouragement and HIV/AIDS Foundation, a non-governmental organisation which aims to improve the social, health and economic status of widows, children and HIV/AIDS victims in Tanzania. Through this experience I supported preparation and execution of community outreach activities focused on HIV awareness without stigma, disease prevention, and family support. Additionally, I accompanied staff on home visits to monitor the wellbeing and nutritional status of families caring for orphaned children. This aspect of my internship significantly broadened my understanding of healthcare. Prior to living and working in Tanzania, much of my academic focus had centered on the biological and clinical aspects of infectious diseases. Through WEHAF, I saw how health outcomes are influenced by factors extending beyond diagnosis and treatment, including nutrition, education, family support, and access to community resources. This highlighted the importance of addressing socio-economic determinants of health in conjunction with medical interventions.

In addition to supporting existing outreach activities, I was able to contribute directly to WEHAF's health education programs by developing a series of educational resources for both adults and children. These included visual awareness posters covering HIV prevention, living well with HIV, breast cancer and cervical cancer, designed to be accessible and easily adapted for local use. I also developed a collection of reusable lesson plans for children ages 6-14 focused on topics such as handwashing and infection prevention, healthy eating, physical activity, oral health, malaria prevention, safe water, mental wellbeing, and basic immune system

function. These resources were delivered during community session and left with the organization for future use. Creating these materials allowed me to apply scientific knowledge from my degree in a practical public health setting and reinforced the importance of effective health communication, prevention strategies, and community education in improving long term health outcomes.

One of the most valuable aspects of this internship was the opportunity to observe healthcare delivery within a system that operates under different resource constraints those typically encountered in the UK. In both the hospital and community settings I observed healthcare professionals adapting to medication shortages and limited resources through the use of alternative medications and flexible treatment approaches when preferred options were unavailable. This demonstrated the importance of adaptability, problem solving, and clinical judgement in ensuring continuity of patient care. Experiencing healthcare in this context highlighted the resilience of healthcare professionals working in these environments. Rather than relying on consistent access and adherence to medical advice and services, staff often had to identify practical solutions that balanced patient needs with available resources. Observing these approaches and conversing with healthcare professionals broadened my understanding of global health challenges and the complexities of delivering effective healthcare across different settings.

In addition, I also became aware of cultural differences in communication and working practices. The Tanzanian cultural concept of *pole pole*, “slowly, slowly” reflected a more measured pace of interaction and relationship building than I am accustomed to in the UK. While initially unfamiliar, this approach emphasizes patience, community engagement, and taking time to understand individual circumstances. Through observing community outreach and home visits, I gained a greater appreciation for the importance of trust-building and long-term engagement in achieving positive health and social outcomes. This experience strengthened my cultural awareness and adaptability when working with people from different backgrounds.

My placement was particularly valuable given my academic background in infection and immunity. Having studied HIV, alongside many other infectious diseases common in East Africa, from a scientific and immunological perspective, I was able to observe the real-world impact of these diseases in individuals, families, and communities. This helped contextualize my academic learning and the importance of combining scientific knowledge with effective public health strategies, health education, and community engagement. It also reinforced the value of preventative healthcare interventions and highlighted the role of NGOs in supporting vulnerable populations. This experience strengthened several transferable skills including communication, cultural awareness, adaptability, and professional confidence. Working and living in an unfamiliar environment required me to engage with people from distinct cultural backgrounds

and adapt to alternative methods of delivering healthcare. These opportunities enhanced my ability to work effectively in diverse settings and increased my appreciation for the challenges and opportunities associated with healthcare delivery in resource-constrained environments.

Overall, this internship was an extremely valuable experience that expanded my understanding of global health and public health practice. It has reinforced my interest in the healthcare sector beyond the laboratory and highlighted the importance of prevention, education, community-based interventions and healthcare systems in improving health outcomes. The James Rennie Bequest funding was instrumental in making this opportunity possible and I am grateful for the support that enabled me to gain this unique international experience. The knowledge and perspectives gained in both parts of my placement will continue to inform both my future studies and my long-term career interests in public health, health policy, and healthcare innovation.