

## **Monash WHO Bioethics Fellowship 2011-2012**

**Lynn Woodward**

### **Internship 5<sup>th</sup> May – 20 July 2012**

For my internship I was based in the Ethics and Health team, a small team which sits inside the Department of Ethics and Social Determinants. My supervisors were Dr Marie-Charlotte Bouesseau and Dr Andreas Reis, both of whom were wonderful to work with – very supportive and encouraging. After a few days of getting to know the unit and its current projects I was able to sit in on the United Nations Inter-Agency Committee for Bioethics. Having been given the job of taking minutes I spent the next two days furiously writing notes, working out acronyms and getting to know the political landscape that these agencies must negotiate in order to keep their member states happy while still trying to function productively and work together with other agencies. And then I had to figure out how to condense my twenty or so pages of scribble down to a 3 page report. But this was a really fantastic way to get a good overview of topics that are of current interest to these international agencies. It was also a good opportunity to meet members of other agencies working in the field of bioethics, who, as it turns out, I would run into several other times during my internship.

Most of the work during my stay with WHO focused on the upcoming Global Summit of National Ethics Committees which the Ethics in Health team acts as the permanent secretariat for. The summit had four main focus areas; Biobanking, Research ethics, Infectious diseases and Organ, Tissue and Cell transplantation, with working groups responsible for each of these. The working groups were required to produce discussion papers on their particular areas; covering the current state of affairs in the area and highlighting issues that may be considered in more depth at the summit. This work was supported by questionnaires that had been sent to all national ethics committees. As permanent secretariat for the Global Summit the Ethics and Health team played an important role in assisting in the final compilation of the discussion papers and the analysis of questionnaires.

Whilst many previous interns had obviously undertaken a lot of background research in these areas, and compiled a lot of data, I was in the quite lucky position to be able to build on this solid foundation and actually see the work through to a final output. The main topic I worked on was Organ, Tissue and Cell transplantation. As well as preparing the final draft of the discussion paper I was also able to do further research in that area, looking at interpretation of international guidelines, different national legislation and approaches to organ donation and issues surrounding organ trafficking. One of the memorable times from my work at WHO was listening to very passionate discussions about altruistic versus paid donation and this has triggered an interest for me that I am hoping to follow in my own research.

Along with the other interns working in the department, I also contributed to the final draft for the Research ethics and Infectious diseases discussion papers. Our efforts in this were well appreciated and kindly acknowledged in the final papers. I was also involved with preparing the annual report for the Collaborating Centres and writing new project proposals for the groups – daunting work, but great to be able to look back and think I was capable of coming up with some outlines that were accepted by this group.

As I have mentioned the Ethics and Health team is only a small unit and really appreciates the contribution of the interns. During my time in the unit there were four other interns, and forming friendship with them, and working together, added to the whole experience. Within WHO there is a large team of interns, with people coming and going all the time. The interns have a very good, social network and you are bound to find people with similar interests to you, both within WHO or in the larger UN interns community – you would never be short of a travel companion, someone to share a meal with, or just someone to hang out with on the weekend.

The timing of my internship really worked well for me and allowed me to go to some very interesting meetings, and this was encouraged by Marie-Charlotte and the team. During my stay I visited Strasbourg to attend a Council of Europe symposium on Biobanking as well as a meeting of the Council's Committee on Bioethics. It was pretty amazing to be able to participate in these meetings, seeing the things that were discussed in different topics of the Monash course being applied to real situations at an international level. I was also able to make the most of being in Europe, and again lucky with the timing and all, and attend the World Congress of Bioethics which was held in Rotterdam. There I heard some incredibly interesting and provoking talks and discussions, it also provide a good opportunity to catch up with the folk from Monash who also attended.

Away from work side of things – Geneva was a fun, albeit somewhat expensive, place to stay. France is just a short bus ride away and it was a lot of fun exploring the surrounding areas, and great markets. Bought a second hand bike and made the most of very bike friendly city, which gave great access to areas around the lake and tested my legs on the mountain rides. I also made the most of cheap flights that you can pick up in Europe, managed a long weekend in Madrid as well as trips in Switzerland and France. My family, including 3 kids, was able to make it over for the last 3 weeks of my internship. This was great showing them around Geneva and taking in Paris (and EuroDisney – avoid during summer holidays, the queues are a killer) and the Swiss Alps – their first time in snow. And as always, Marie-Charlotte and Andreas were very generous and understanding in allowing me some extra time off to have these adventures with my family.

All in all I would totally recommend the WHO Fellowship experience, to be able to actually work and make a contribution at this international level is a great opportunity. And it really builds your confidence in the area; the other interns and I would be given what seemed like a huge task and would think – do they honestly think we can do that. And in fact, we could – the background you get from the Monash course stands you in good stead. Since returning from my internship I have put together and delivered an undergraduate subject on Introductory Bioethics for medical students at my univeristy, which was largely drawn from my experiences in the Ethics and Health team. And as I mentioned earlier, I gained some focus for future research directions, so for me it has really helped, and will continue to help, shape my career. I would like to say a huge thanks to the Monash Centre for Human Bioethics for making this trip possible and strongly encourage anyone interested in applying for the WHO Bioethics Fellowship to just go for it – it was the most amazing experience.