SPHPM Summer Vacation Program 2016 – Report

In the final semester of my Bachelor of Biomedical Science, I applied to the SPHPM Summer Vacation Program as a means of placing the skills I've developed in an undergraduate degree in the context of real clinical research. Under that broad aim, I was very pleased that the research team I worked with was keen not only on developing core research skills, but also on growing our networks by putting us in touch with researchers who were eager to teach. Further, I was also given the opportunity to direct my own project. Although daunting at first, being able to develop my own research allowed me to appreciate the challenges associated with developing focused research questions when faced with a broad research field.

In terms of the substantive research I was participating in, I worked with the health, law and ageing unit at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine and my project supervisor was Professor Joseph Ibrahim. From the onset, Professor Ibrahim was very open to us directing our own projects and helped us decide on a particular question to research. With Professor Ibrahim's help, I focused on comparing aged care systems internationally to determine whether or not evidence obtained from studies in Australia, was comparable to evidence gathered in other similar developed nations. Surprisingly, our early findings were that there were significant differences in the way each country managed residential aged care and that there were potentially several key differences that may affect how evidence is translated from country to country.

Beyond our own projects, the summer vacation program also offered many unique opportunities to meet leading researchers with a diverse range of research interests. A particular highlight of mine was being able to visit the Alfred's ICU/Trauma unit and discuss targeted temperature management and ECMO-CPR with researchers and staff who have first-hand experience with these cutting edge therapies. As well as this, having access to SPHPM's weekly seminar series allowed us to hear about research across the department. Interestingly, what I found most educational about the seminar series were in fact the questions asked by the audience, providing me with an idea of what aspects are important to keep in mind when critiquing research.

Overall, I benefited from the program in three key ways. First, by being placed within an active research team, I was able to develop strong relationships with other researchers in the field of health and ageing. Secondly, I was able to begin a research project which I will continue to refine and aim to publish. Finally, the program helped solidify my goal of incorporating research into my future career path as I now have a clear picture of how large an impact research can make on clinical medicine.

In short, the SPHPM Summer Vacation program was much more than just a way to implement research skills. The program allowed us to develop working relationships with colleagues, open opportunities and provided us with an, as realistic as possible, experience of research.

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