

Report for 2012/13 Monash-WHO fellowship – by Evie Kendal



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I was awarded the Monash-WHO fellowship in 2012 and deferred travel until October 2013. My eight-week [internship](#) ran until mid-December and was followed up with some tourist travel over Christmas in Prato, Italy and Prague, Czech Republic (although I did see my first real snow, sadly it was not a White Christmas). While October-December is a quieter time of year at the WHO than the more popular June-July summer period, there were still an estimated 100 interns on-site. Since numbers can get as high as 600, avoiding this peak period made it easier to find available office space and independent projects to work on. I spent most of my time researching the ethics of verbal autopsy, a vital statistics measure I was entirely unfamiliar with before going to the WHO. I also worked on updating some staff ethics training presentations and providing background information for a publication on research ethics committees, a collaborative project involving health professionals and academics from leading institutions around the world.

In addition to meeting all of the team at the [Global Health Ethics unit](#) I had the opportunity to meet with the members of a bioethics think tank from Zurich and accompany them on a visit to the Strategic Health Operations Centre (SHOC room) where the WHO coordinates emergency responses to global health threats. At the time we were there the task force responding to the Philippines typhoon was using this as their base of operations. I also got to attend two of the WHO Ethics Review Committee meetings to see how they work.

Tips for future fellows

It was quite difficult to piece together all the bits of information I needed before I left for the WHO, so I have included some links here that might be helpful.

The internship paperwork

There is a lot of conflicting advice online regarding whether unpaid interns require a work visa in Switzerland so I checked with the Swiss consulate and they stated that WHO HQ interns are required to have BOTH a [visa](#) and a cantonal [carte de legitimisation](#). The first needs to be arranged in Australia, and the second will be organised by the WHO staff orientation services (SOS) the first day you arrive. The systems for receiving security badges, IT access and registering your stay with the local authorities are smooth and efficient, however, while the first two are done automatically at the security desk before you can enter the building, the third requires some chasing up (and if you want to avoid paying for passport photos you'll need to bring some along). Remember, you will need to bring your passport, intern offer letter and any other paperwork requested to security before you can enter the building. Your security photo will then be taken and checked every time you re-enter (you can have visitors come to see you and join you for lunch but you will need to pick them up at the main entrance and show your badge to the guard on duty).

The intern board

The WHO intern board are quite an organised group and run tours, weekly lunches and a bunch of social and sporting events. You should be automatically added to their mailing list when your IT access is set up. They also have a useful [welcome package](#) to read before you go. The intern cupboard is where interns donate and exchange items, ranging from food to bicycles. There is also a dedicated intern gym where volunteers from within the cohort run classes for other interns (this is quite difficult to find unless you go on the orientation tour). For most intern activities the meeting place is the "big painting" which is between the WHO library and the Ritazza café. This strip also has the post office, bank and gift shop. (Tip: if you want a "latte" you need to order a "café renversé," which literally translates to "knocked over coffee.") You can elect to join the intern board while you are at the WHO if you want to assist other interns during their stay. I recommend emailing the intern board to ask if there are any "freebies" for interns (for example, while I was there all interns were entitled to a free WHO branded drinking glass which made a nice souvenir, and the main cafeteria was offering special prices for some meals).

Accommodation

Almost every intern I spoke to had a horror story regarding accommodation. Some never managed to find a place on the Swiss side of the border so were commuting from France everyday. I stayed at the [John Knox Centre](#), which I was really happy with and thoroughly recommend. You can choose from dormitory-

style single rooms with shared bathrooms, double rooms with private bathrooms, or bachelor apartments with full kitchen and bathroom. If you are in the dorms there are some very basic cooking facilities and a shared fridge in the lounge and TV room. All rooms include linen, cleaning and wi-fi, and there is the option of connecting a telephone, although this costs extra. There is also a computer room and a coin-operated laundry on-site. A printer, copier, fax machine and public telephone are available in the lobby, along with a vending machine. All rooms except the bachelor apartment include breakfast in the cafeteria, and lunches and dinners can be charged to the room (prices and menus are displayed in the lobby). As with the hotels in town, the John Knox Centre provides a free public transport card to all guests during their stay, which covers a wide area and even includes some boat travel. Since the centre is only a five-minute walk from the WHO a lot of WHO conferences are actually conducted there.

Transport

Geneva's public transport system is very easy to use and there is a bus that leaves from outside the front of the WHO and takes you to the main shopping district and train station, [Gare Cornavin](#). There are also buses and trains from the airport to take you into the city and a free 90-minute ticket can be collected from the baggage claim area. Public transport itineraries are available on [TPG's](#) website, and an app is also available for your phone. If you don't speak French it will be a comfort to know that most buses have helpful diagrams that show you where you are and what stops are coming up. One thing to keep in mind is, unlike in Australia, you are expected to enter and exit the bus through the rear door. This means you neither speak to the driver nor show them your ticket. Occasionally ticket inspectors will board, but this is more common on the trains. If you need to cross the border into France you can save quite a bit of money if you take the bus to the last stop on the Swiss side and then just walk over. This is relevant if you want to do grocery shopping in France, where most items are significantly cheaper.

Cultural aspects

Switzerland is very orderly and peaceful so traits like punctuality and cleanliness are highly regarded. There are very strict noise pollution laws in Geneva (I recommend reading [this document](#) for details). The Swiss are very proud of their history as a refuge for people fleeing persecution and thus prize tolerance (fortunately this extends to tourists who don't speak French!). Some foreign travellers might misinterpret Swiss professionalism and respect as coldness; however, a short conversation usually demonstrates how friendly everyone really is. Respect for the elderly is evident in how older people are treated, particularly on public transport. Business attire is quite formal and most interns will be wearing suits (including a tie for men) or dresses (for women).

To differentiate themselves from the French, Swiss people may greet each other with three kisses on the cheek, instead of two. This practice appeared to be more common between women, with men often preferring to shake hands. Gender

roles are slightly more traditional in Geneva than in Melbourne, for example, with men holding doors open for women and paying for meals and drinks when eating out. So if you are a woman and the lift arrives and no one is entering, it could be that the men in front of the line are waiting for you to get on first. For the most part this attention is fine, however, when travelling alone in the city it is not uncommon to be asked out several times by strangers (if eating alone in a restaurant there is also the chance random men will simply join you on your table). For more on etiquette I recommend [this site](#).

After your internship

At the end of your internship you will be asked to sign up to the WHO intern alumni email list. This is recommended as the emails contain job opportunities across a number of fields (although the majority are in the US). Your supervisor can fill in an evaluation if you need one for resume purposes (the form is available on the WHO intranet, which you will have access to while interning). You will also have the opportunity to provide feedback on your experiences. The other thing to keep in mind is your email and IT access may be cut off before your last day so you always need to keep a back-up of your files and make sure the people you are working with have your personal email as well. It is customary to present your work to your department toward the end of the internship.

The most important advice I can give regarding the end of your internship is to buy many, many kilograms of [Läderach](#) chocolate before your leave. If this means you have to abandon half of your luggage to make room, well, that's what the intern cupboard is for! Also, don't miss the opportunity to see some more of Europe while you're there and be sure to ask WHO staff for recommendations when it comes to sightseeing.