

Monash-WHO Bioethics Fellowship 2010

Report for Monash University

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Internship 14th June 2010- 20th August 2010

My Internship at the WHO was undertaken with the Ethics and Health Unit, a branch of the Department of Ethics, Equity, Trade and Human Rights (ETH) in the Information, Evidence and Research Cluster of the World Health Organization. For the 10 weeks I was in Geneva I was attached to the Ethics Unit's two Technical Officers, Dr Marie-Charlotte Bouesseau and Dr Andreas Reis who were both wonderful supervisors and very supportive during my time in HQ.

The Ethics Unit looks at a wide variety of issues relating to ethics in global health. At present their activities are in 4 major areas.

- 1) Ethics in Pandemics and Pandemic Preparedness,
- 2) Ethical Issues related to Tuberculosis
- 3) Ethics and Organ Transplantation and
- 4) Research Ethics and Clinical Trial Registration.

Prior to leaving for Geneva I had received very positive feedback on the internship from previous Monash Intern Jennifer Brown, but I did not have any firm ideas about what I would be doing, or even what to expect when I arrived in Geneva. The Ethics Unit is a wonderful area to be placed in, because of the variety of the work, and the way in which Dr Bousseau and Dr Reis involve the interns in all aspects of the Units activities, and encourage them to undertake work that is both interesting and useful to the ongoing activities of the Unit. When I arrived Dr Bousseau spent time with me discussing my areas of interest, discussing projects currently being worked on by the department and establishing what I could work on during my time here.

During my time in Geneva I was mainly involved in working on the ethics of organ transplantation. This was a whole new area for me. I started with undertaking a comparison between the 2010 WHO Guiding Principles on Human Cell, Tissue and Organ Transplantation (which had been endorsed by the World Health Assembly in May 2010 just prior to my arrival) and the 1991 WHO guiding Principles on Human Organ Transplantation and other international documents looking at the ethics of organ transplantation. These included documents by the Council of Europe, the World Medical Association and the Transplantation Society. Based on this I researched statements made by National Ethics Committees on Organ Transplantation and compiled this information in preparation for the 8th Global Summit of National Bioethics Advisory Bodies. The Global Summit is held biennially and in 2010 was held in Singapore from the 26th to 27th of July. The Department of Ethics at the WHO provides the permanent secretariat for the Global Summit so as well as providing research on transplantation for Dr Bouesseau (who gave a presentation on organ transplantation during the summit), I was also able to be involved in discussions between the host organization (The Bioethics Advisory Council of Singapore) and the WHO and gain insight into what is involved in organizing these international meetings.

Based on the research I had undertaken during the second part of my internship I was able to make contact with Dr Luc Noel, who coordinates the Organ Transplantation group in the WHO. With the assistance of data provided by his group from the Global Transplant Observatory, I drafted a paper on available statements by national bioethics committees on organ transplant, and the possible roles of national bioethics committees in encouraging the implementation of WHO guiding principles. As I am a clinical doctor, and have only ever written papers on clinical research, drafting a paper about ethical issues was a challenge that I greatly enjoyed.

As well as working on organ transplantation I was also involved in a number of other projects during my time at the WHO. I was involved in updating the list of National Bioethics Committees that serves as a contact document and ended up being the basis for a lot of my research. After the Global Summit I was also able to help with researching National Bioethics Committee publications on tuberculosis. This was to provide Dr Reis with background information to facilitate the formation of a working group of National Bioethics Committees to consider ethical issues associated with TB.

As well as the work I was doing, my time at the WHO gave me the opportunity to get involved in lots of other activities. I was lucky enough to be attached to the Ethics Unit at the same time as two other interns, Rachel Mills from the USA and Ning Wang from China. This gave me the opportunity to gain insight into the work that they were doing, their interactions with other departments and see other aspects of the Units activities. I was also luck enough to be able to attend a number of talks, by a wide range of international speakers. These WHO lunchtime seminars cover many different aspects of work that the organization is doing and were a great opportunity to learn about different fields. The topics ranged from the ethics of health information technology to recent updates on the polio eradication policy. Finally I was also able to observe a meeting of the WHO Research Ethics Committee. As someone who has in the past submitted research proposals to ethics committees it was fascinating to observe from the other side of the experience, particularly given the wide variety of research projects the WHO is involved in and are considered by the committee.

As well as this there is a hugely active intern community at the WHO. When I arrived in June I became one of 250 interns in the organization. During my time in Geneva being part of this community gave me the opportunity to see other international organizations (including the International Labour Organization, The World Intellectual Property Organization, UNAIDS and the United Nations building itself), travel around Switzerland, experience all the sights of Geneva

and even on WHO Intern Day the opportunity to take part in a Question and Answer session with WHO Director General Margaret Chan. The intern community is incredibly diverse, and so I had the opportunity to meet a huge number of people from different backgrounds and countries who can provide a new and different insight into both the WHO and the work being done. I was also able to become involved with the WHO intern board, and help with organizing some of the experts for interns talk series. This aims to give interns a greater insight into the paths that people take leading to working for the WHO, and the real challenges and rewards of working for an international organization.

As previous interns have said, time as an intern at the WHO is what you make it, and I have found it to be full of opportunities and once in a lifetime experiences. I have been lucky enough to be able to work on a manuscript, which I will be able to have ongoing involvement with. I would like to give my most heartfelt thanks to Dr Bouesseau and Dr Reis who have been amazing supervisors and gave me opportunities to quickly become involved in the work of the Ethics Unit and life at the WHO. I would also like to thank Ms Edith Ndam for helping me get settled in so quickly.

These 10 weeks has been one of the most amazing experiences of my life and certainly one that has given me opportunities I will never forget. I would like to encourage any bioethics student who has even vaguely considered applying for the Monash-WHO bioethics fellowship to do so because the opportunity is a once in a lifetime one. Finally I would like to thank Monash University for this amazing opportunity. For a young doctor the chance to experience first hand the work done by the WHO is a dream come true, and one that I would never have been able to achieve without the support of the Monash-WHO Bioethics Fellowship program.