

2018 The Gambia



Health System Strengthening in The Gambia: A Continuation of Prior Work

Led by Dr. Melissa McDiarmid, MD, MPH, School of Medicine, with Joanna Gaitens, MSN, MPH, PD, School of Medicine

Students (school affiliation): Elyse De Laitre (Nursing), Yolanda Peprah (Pharmacy), Alexandria Swales (Social Work), and Victoria Wolf (Pharmacy)

Project Summary

The purpose of this visit was to work together with several Gambian partners, including the University of the Gambia (UTG) School of Medicine and Allied Health Services (SMAHS) and the Gambian Ministry of Health (MoH), to advance previously identified collaborative goals to build resiliency in the Gambian health system. UMB faculty visited UTG in 2014 to identify potential partners and potential research collaborations that might be undertaken as part of the UMB Global Interprofessional Education (IPE) Program. In 2016, the IPE Gambia trip focused on a topic of shared interest identified in the 2014 visit: strengthening the health system through activities to promote and protect the Gambian health care workforce. The recent loss of many health care workers (HCWs) in neighboring countries during the Ebola crisis, combined with the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasis on promoting sustainable development through a functioning health system, has advanced protections for HCWs to a higher priority in the region.

The current UMB team was in the Gambia from June 16, 2018, to June 30, 2018. The anchoring activity was a three-day Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) workshop for MoH and other Gambian public health and health care providers. More than 30 individuals participated in this workshop, which focused on developing an occupational health and safety policy and assessment

tools for the protection of health workers in three priority areas: airborne hazards, bloodborne pathogen exposure, and waste management. Activities following the training included performing two hospital walkthroughs with MoH colleagues and local health workers to collaboratively identify potential health and safety hazards for HCWs related to three priority areas. As a result of all of these activities, draft policy and implementation tools were created for each priority area and plans creating a single national occupational health and safety policy for HCWs in the Gambia were outlined. Our team also attended several meetings with key actors in the health sector, including the Gambian Minister of Health and World Health Organization (WHO) representatives.

Reflections

"Traveling to The Gambia was an incredible experience. Having the opportunity to collaborate and learn from medical and public health professionals in a country facing both similar and different occupational hazards from our own in the U.S. was very interesting and educational. Our work on policy initiatives and forming relationships with the Ministry of Health felt productive, and I hope to have the opportunity to travel back to this region in the future." — Elyse De Laittre