

MY FIELD EXPERIENCE AS A CSP IN THE YEAR 2002

During the latter part of 2001, I learnt that I did not get any of my choices in hospitals to do my community service. I then submitted my choices for the second round and got placed in Gauteng! I thereafter begged and pleaded to get a position within KwaZulu-Natal. I was desperate. This was when I was offered Hlabisa Hospital as my choice for community service.

I had never heard of Hlabisa hospital, let alone knew that it was in the northern KwaZulu-Natal area. I went to see the place in December 2001 and was totally astounded by the lack of a tarred road leading to the hospital and the animals that had free reign over the area. It was a shock to my senses as most things that we ordinarily take for granted, were not to be found. Hlabisa Hospital is about 250km away from Durban and lies in the heart of one of the most beautiful Game Parks that I have ever seen.

I was given a 3-bedroom house to be shared amongst a doctor, a dental therapist and myself. It was love at first sight when I was shown the accommodation I was to have and this helped to persuade me to stay at Hlabisa. I felt that even though I had not seen the entire hospital and pharmacy, if I could be happy with my accommodation then half of my problem would be solved. Accepting the post, as I had no other viable option, I decided that the year 2002 will fly by and I would soon be out of Hlabisa. The most important advice that I had received prior to arriving at Hlabisa was that I had to go into this position with an open mind. Narrow-mindedness could not be a factor.

Upon my first day at Hlabisa Hospital, I was made welcome by the pharmacy staff and hospital management. The pharmacy department had not had a pharmacist for 8 months and was being run by the pharmacy assistants. I was introduced to the workings in the pharmacy and taught the routine by the chief assistant. It was quite an undertaking. The pharmacy was basically running very well without a pharmacist in terms of ordering medication, dealing with clinic queries, etc. However there was definitely a need for a pharmacist as there were certain matters that required a pharmacist.

The hospital pharmacy serves 14 fixed clinics, 2 mobile services and the hospital itself. It took me a while to get my footing but once I did, it was full steam ahead. I loved the fact that here at Hlabisa, I was involved in the management side of the pharmacy and the hospital itself. I had to plan staff meetings, duty rosters, staff vacation leave, do PMSC orders, attend cash flow meetings, sectional head meetings and also attend any pertinent workshops relating to the hospital and the pharmacy. I am thankful that after I leave Hlabisa, I will not be thought of as merely a pill counter, a face behind the counter but as a person who attempted to get involved in the running of pharmacy and the hospital.

I attended to all clinic queries with respect to medication orders, maintenance of the dispensary in the clinics and also did in-service training with the nurses on maintaining stock control, doing clinic orders, etc. I loved the fact that I was imparting useful information to other people. I also undertook tutoring 3 staff members in the pharmacy assistant's course. It was quite an undertaking and took up a lot of time but my students and I persevered through it all. Although I was only a community service pharmacist, I was given lots of respect and admiration from others. I have come to believe that one cannot expect respect to be given to you merely because you are professional, you have to earn it by the things that you do and in manner in which you treat others.

The pharmacy assistants have years of experience and that invaluable knowledge can never be compared to my theoretical knowledge that I was taught at university. I am so grateful to my staff at Hlabisa Hospital for their willingness to share that knowledge with me and to accept my ideas and suggestions as a means to make things better at the pharmacy. I cannot put into words how much I've loved my year here at Hlabisa. It has taught me so much. I would never have gotten this much knowledge, self-confidence and maturity if I had done my community service in an urban hospital. Working in an environment such as this one either makes or breaks a person and it is up to the individual to decide what it is going to be.

As I end my year at Hlabisa, I leave with a heavy heart and tears in my eyes. I am glad that I was not merely one of ten other community service pharmacists working in an urban hospital. At Hlabisa I was made to feel a part of the hospital community. I leave this hospital knowing that all my efforts did not go unnoticed and that I have grown by leaps and bounds and all this growth has made me much better person, both professionally and personally.

To Hlabisa Hospital's staff, thank you for wonderful year and for brilliant relationships that I have built.

NAME: MISS. NADIA KHAN
HLABISA HOSPITAL
CSP2002