Lauren’s Major: Nursing

Program: UW Nursing in Malawi, Summer

Academic Life: This program was hosted out of the city Blantyre, the largest city in Malawi. Myself, eight other nursing students, two faculty members and three or four translators traveled between health care facilities in villages and rural areas, NGOs, orphan care centers, and tertiary city district hospitals. We all participated in community assessments; identifying the strengths and needs of the community and informing the population about the resources to aid their needs. At the NGO sites, a partnered student and I taught adolescents and children about diseases including malaria, diarrhea, and HIV/AIDS. We applied factual information, de-bunked treatment and spreading myths, and utilized teach-back techniques as well as demonstrations. From the health care centers, we shadowed first and second year student nurses in Queen Elizabeth Hospital, the largest referral hospital in the country. This allowed us to better understand the health care comparisons and disparities not only between our culture and theirs, but were also better able to understand the fundamental strategy for why one health care system works better in one region versus another.

Cultural Difference: The contentedness between people and their loved ones was outstanding and memorable. I feel like in the U.S. we pride ourselves on our progress and technology and we do not realize how much it can actually separate us from who we love. As a future nurse, I learned much about the concept of healing touch and just how important human contact and kindness can really shape a person’s day. By just acknowledging someone’s existence by looking at them, touching their hand or shoulder, and talking to them without the interface of a screen really inspires a person to care on a whole new level.

“A few weeks [abroad] leads to lifestyle changes and stories that will shape you and others around you for the better.”