Fulbright-Fogarty fellowships expand global health research opportunities

Fogarty has partnered with the Fulbright Program, the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government, to promote the expansion of research in public health and clinical research in resource-limited settings for medical and graduate students.

The Fulbright-Fogarty Fellowships offer clinical research training opportunities for U.S. pre-doctoral students at sites in low- and middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America. The goal is to encourage innovative evidence-based public health research training, problem-based learning and clinical preceptorships. The program also encourages collaboration among the Fulbright-Fogarty fellows, who are mentored by experienced U.S. and foreign faculty and researchers.

Advanced students in M.D. and Ph.D. programs who are U.S. citizens, but do not have their doctoral degrees at the time of application, are eligible to apply for the one-year assignments.

The Fulbright Program, part of the Department of State’s Office of Academic Exchanges Programs, is administered by the Institute of International Education.

Fellow studies cholera in Bangladesh

Dr. Brie Falkard used her Fulbright-Fogarty Fellowship to investigate how the human immune system reacted in cholera patients in Bangladesh. Her research focused on the hormone leptin, which mediates immune responses as well as metabolic processes, including appetite. First, she and her team measured the hormone in a small group of children—some with cholera and others without the disease—and followed them for 180 days. Leptin concentrations were lowest in acutely sick children. Researchers next studied 74 infected children and found that low leptin levels on the second day of illness were associated with improved immune responses to cholera, but only occurred in children with better nutritional status.

Falkard’s fellowship enabled her to learn more lab skills, such as flow cytometry and how to conduct a variety of immunological tests. “It was a really great space with a lot of robust research projects going on that you could help out whenever you wanted to learn.” She also developed as a mentor, training others in some lab techniques.

Fellow investigates HIV/AIDS and TB in Malawi

Dr. Brian Barnett knew firsthand about holes in the health care system well before he arrived in Malawi as a Fulbright-Fogarty fellow. Barnett’s home county of 15,000 in rural Kentucky was served by one doctor. “We have all the typical southern health problems in my family: diabetes, heart disease and the like,” he said. “Every time someone needed medical care it was a two-hour drive to Lexington. In the developing world, people might have to travel two days and still not get the kind of care they need.”

During his fellowship, Barnett studied HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and mother-to-child transmission of disease, based at the University of North Carolina’s project in Lilongwe. Using liquid culture methods, which allow for quick detection of TB drug resistance, Barnett and his team analyzed sputum samples to quantify the prevalence of multiple drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) in Lilongwe. He said he learned a lot about the pathology, diagnosis and treatment of TB.