Engaging with Rural Public Health: A Summer with MRC/Wits

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Introduction
• Interned for the head of the public engagement office of the Medical Research Council/Wits Rural Public Health and Health Transitions Research Unit
• Unit is a Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) site that attempts to better understand the dynamics of health, population, and social transitions in rural South Africa

Objective of Internship
• Wanted to experience public health work firsthand, and South Africa was a point of interest based on past studies.

Work Profile
• Main task was to create fact sheets that contained the important information from last year’s annual census
• Fact sheets distributed at annual village community feedback meetings and reach approximately 100,000 people in the 32-village HDSS site

Reflections
• Helped the unit produce the fact sheets translated in the local language, Shangaan, for the first time
• Annual census transitioning to an electronic census in an attempt to have up-to-date methods of collecting and disseminating information
• Saw in meetings how the aim was for a research smart community

Looking Ahead
• Solidified interest in pursuing a certificate in Global Health and Health Policy in addition to being premed
• Considering doing more work on the continent through another University program, but ideally in Nigeria due to familial ties

Questions
• Will the transition to an electronic census improve data collection?
• Is the work of this HDSS effectively informing the village communities and changing attitudes?

Conclusion
• This internship was a great opportunity to see the inner works of the public health sector. Though the work was often clerical, it provided a vantage point to see the logistical work that goes on behind the scenes of public health.

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