

Far From Home

When I hear somebody sigh, "Life is hard," I am always tempted to ask, "Compared to what?"

- Sydney J. Harris

I recently was privileged to hear [Dr. Claire Wendland](#) [1] describe two groups of medical trainees.

The first was a group of medical students from the United States spending time in the sub-Saharan African country of [Malawi](#) [2]. Each day, the students learned from their American professors and African colleagues. The students were surrounded by patients with diseases that they had previously encountered only in textbooks and lectures — malaria, untreated HIV/AIDS, the late stages of tuberculosis. Many patients had very advanced disease or long-neglected illness. The students were immersed in a medical system that relied heavily on improvisation. The medical facilities had inconsistent electricity, limited imaging studies and bare-bones laboratory testing. The students also noted that the Malawi hospital had none of the American obsessions with billing and record keeping.

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[1] http://www.anthropology.wisc.edu/people_wendland.php

[2] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mi.html>

[3] <http://www.froedtert.com/HealthResources/ReadingRoom/HealthBlogs/Reflections/FarFromHome.htm>