South Africa is a country with a turbulent history, with resultant large inequalities in wealth, education and health. Despite the challenges it faces, this country has developed significant expertise in the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, particularly TB and HIV. Bethesda Hospital is a district hospital founded in 1937 by the Methodist Church and now run by the Provincial Government. It is situated in the Umkhanyakude Health district, located in the northeastern corner of KwaZulu-Natal in the small village of Ubombo, overlooking the Northern Maputaland planes. The nearest town with the nearest school is called Mkuze, 16 kilometers away at the foot of the mountain. Most patients speak Zulu, although the doctors discuss cases in English. According to national policy, public health care is provided along a tiered referral system. Bethesda Hospital serves as both a primary and secondary level medical facility to a population of about 100,000 people in an area of about 1500 square kilometers. Patients are transferred to referral hospitals, as necessary, for more acute or specialized services.

In spring of 2019, students will have the opportunity to care for a wide range of patients at Bethesda Hospital, including those presenting with common opportunistic infections associated with HIV (i.e. tuberculosis and cryptococcal meningitis). The experience can be tailored to your interests, with opportunities on the Ob-Gyn, Emergency Medicine and general Internal Medicine services. Supervision of UCLA medical students is by senior medical staff on site, and students work alongside Clinical Officers and the equivalent of residents and medical students from an affiliated medical school in the region (University KwaZulu-Natal or “UKZN”).

The rotation has been developed with formal goals and objectives. We are seeking students with an interest in caring for underserved populations, and those with enthusiasm for learning more about global health, infectious diseases and health care delivery in resource poor settings. Students will be expected to demonstrate the highest level of maturity, professionalism and cultural sensitivity. Given the geographic location of Bethesda Hospital, past students have recommended renting a car in Johannesburg and driving to Bethesda. On-site accommodations are available for UCLA students. All rotating medical students must be pre-register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

Students will receive $2,500 of support for the Bethesda Hospital South Africa clinical rotation. These funds will be awarded upon return from South Africa to contribute to the costs of roundtrip airfare and in-country accommodation and food. Students will need to cover the remaining expenses from other funds, as the cost of this rotation will exceed the amount provided by the Center for World Health.

Interviews for the elective will take place on Friday, October 5, Saturday, October 6, and Tuesday, October 9, 2018. Students selected for this rotation are required to participate in a full day pre-departure training program in Los Angeles on Saturday, January 12, 2019. Upon return home from South Africa, students will be expected to provide feedback through written evaluation forms, and participate in a mandatory lunchtime feedback session on Thursday, May 30, 2019.

Rotation dates for this elective have been confirmed. Students applying to this elective must be able to commit to this elective from April 8, 2019 through April 26, 2019. Note that an April 8 start date will require departure from the U.S. by April 6, 2019, at the latest.

Questions regarding this rotation should be directed to Dr. Traci Wells at twells@mednet.ucla.edu. Thank you for your interest in the clinical experience at Bethesda Hospital in Ubombo, South Africa!