

No Accidents, Only Appointments

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Caitlin Stiglmeier is a pediatrician who spent the month of March 2015 working in rural India. Her occasional FaceBook pieces are captivating. Here is a recent one, dated May 11.

It's difficult to comprehend, still, the full scope and magnitude of my time in India. I felt I was merely being led to communities, families, individuals for a reason, through no control of my own. I lived much 'freer' in India, relinquishing all control over a situation yet still attempting to intervene medically when I was able.

This family was the first of many I saw in a migrant community in Segwa, and their expressions say it all. Mom was very skeptical, wary of the white person who appeared out of nowhere and asked so many questions. Dad was elated, stating I was a 'god in the flesh', physically here to help rather than an inanimate object in a temple. The children either greeted me with smiles and laughter or tears and tentative glances.

Meeting with this community for the first time and subsequently returning twice more instilled their faith in me that I had no hidden agenda: I was there simply to do rudimentary health care checks and anthropometric measures in order to improve their access to health care. On the third visit, we intercepted two very sick children being held by their mothers on the side of the road, not seeming to know where to go. Because they spoke a different dialect than Gujarati, even my field guide and interpreter, Pranav, couldn't communicate with them. Through a string of migrants and four different languages, we got the children to our hospital, a situation that was almost unheard of.

Migrants from this community typically would refuse to be brought anywhere. But we got the children admitted, got much needed antipyretics and antibiotics into them, and hopefully saved their lives. The family left in the middle of the night from the hospital, perhaps afraid to stay longer, perhaps the mistrust creeping back from not understanding why their children needed to stay longer. I can only hope they continued to improve.

India continued to remind me that 'there are no accidents, there are only appointments'.