



NATALIE DEUTCH
Class of 2015
Boone, NC

Natalie Deutch

They say that in India, nothing ever goes quite the way you planned. They also say that India gives you what you need, not what you want. When I went to study Ayurveda in Hyderabad, I learned that both of these things are true.

Ayurveda is a traditional Indian healing and wellness system. It focuses on the balance of three doshas or energy patterns—vata, pitta and kapha. Imbalance in these doshas, caused by stress, poor diet, weather, etc., exhibits as disease. Treatments focus on aligning whichever dosha is out of whack with herbs, diet and massage.

CONTINUED ►

I grew up using Ayurveda and seeing people being miraculously healed of disease. When I came to UNC, my biology classes seemed to say that this way of healing was impossible. But the way I saw it, why couldn't the two be complementary? My questions brought me to Hyderabad.

When I left the US I was armed with a great plan to analyze blood tests, pore over medical textbooks, hold organized meetings every day, and conduct formal surveys while taking meticulous notes to figure out how Ayurveda works on a biological scale. The day I left the US, 'research' still meant my sterile lab bench in Fordham Hall. After a few hours in Hyderabad, I realized that things were going to have to work just a bit differently. At first I struggled. A lot. I wanted to plot out cellular pathways, but instead I could barely ask a question as the doctor checked dozens of people's pulses each day. Meanwhile he doled out prescriptions such as, 'Take 15 pills that have been dried in the moonlight for a fortnight.' When I asked why these things worked, I was generally answered in stories from the Ramayana — not quite the statistically measurable data I was hoping for. There were some days of serious frustration. But after a little while I learned that the knowledge would come less from trying to overanalyze and more from just soaking it all in. Every morning and evening I went for long walks with patients. I got to know not just what their T-3 enzyme levels were, but also how the treatments made them feel and what other things they had tried; how their condition affected their jobs and even their kids. Soon my questions switched from 'How does

Ayurveda work in the genetic code?' to 'How does religion intertwine with Ayurveda?' and 'Could Ayurveda be compatible with the Western lifestyle?'

Working in a less structured research environment allowed me to expand my field of study and get a look at all aspects of the system. I went to Bangalore, where I visited a clinic that incorporated acupuncture and yoga and even had a biomedical research branch. They had beautiful gardens full of all the herbs used in the treatments, and it was so cool to be able to see everything

Dr. Raju had been prescribing 'in the flesh.'

In Udupi I toured an Ayurvedic distribution center that processes and ships packaged herbs all over the world. There I stayed with a pandit (Vedic priest) who does yagyas,

blessings, for people doing Ayurvedic treatments, and also works with some of the herbs. This was a hard aspect of medicine to wrap my biology-brain around, but it let me see just how much heart goes into the process.

To start to unwind the biology of Ayurveda, Dr. Raju and I organized allopathic tests to measure patients' progress with the treatments. It was great to see quantitative measurements to go along with patient testimonials. For the most part we knew when the treatments were working, but often times the biomedical results were much better than we would have expected. Measuring the patients' health within a Western framework actually reassured them, and many plan to continue monitoring their progress after leaving the clinic. And after Dr. Raju felt an issue with my thyroid in



my pulse, it was remarkable to see the nodule I didn't know existed via a Western scan.

This experience has given me a well-rounded experience of Ayurveda and people in general. Every day I learned about new illnesses, from Myasthenia Gravis to thyroid disease, and I learned to look at the whole person, not just the statistics. Even if I didn't learn the exact molecular pathway behind Shirodara, I did learn the theory behind all of the treatments. This knowledge and all of the connections I made with patients and doctors has given me the insight to ask more questions about medicine, culture, and healing in real life.

Yeah, it's true what they say about India. I came to India with a plan, and I came back with something completely different—something so much better and more real. My Burch Fellowship gave me the chance to roll with it and take advantage of everything India had to offer. I had the best summer of my life, and I developed strong roots for a future of exploration. I am forever thankful to everyone who made this possible!

