After multiple days of traveling and pulling an all-nighter at the Nairobi airport, we arrived in Kisumu. The country was so breathtakingly beautiful that I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the plane window to even take a picture. I never imagined it would be so green. We got our first lesson in being flexible on this trip when we had to switch hotels last minute after already starting to settle in at the first one. The staff at St. Johns Manor were awesome and were able to get us into our rooms in no time despite having had only a brief warning that almost 30 people would be showing up and staying for 2.5 weeks. There were two cats and three of their kittens (one pictured above) that would hang out with us during our stay at the hotel. The last picture is outside the hotel while waiting for the vans in the morning. Patients weren’t the only ones who were receiving OMM on the trip. It wasn’t uncommon to see students doing OMM on each other before and after clinic.
Most mornings we would wake up early and go on a run through the neighborhood. Many of the people living along this route were wealthy and had fairly large homes with gates, barbed wired fences, and guards. We would often see monkeys hanging out in the trees on the side of the road while on these runs. While the majority of our route was on paved road, there were a couple of dirt roads that we would run through that got quite muddy after it would rain (which was often). Some workers were painting lines on the paved roads, possibly for the first time, while we were there. While there are still many dirt roads in Kenya, we got to witness the massive amount of work going into the infrastructure throughout the country. The end of our route culminated with the edge of Lake Victoria where some fishermen lived. We would often see people bathing in the lake and I always wondered how much they knew about/feared schistosomiasis. I also figured it probably didn’t matter when you didn’t have an alternative.
We had to commute to the clinic in 3 vans, although we would often end up squeezing into 2 on the ride home. There was no A/C and to say that the road was bumpy would be an understatement. It wasn’t possible for a car to make it through, especially after it had rained. Clinic was almost canceled one day because the roads were so bad that the vans might not have made it. There were usually less patients on these post-rainy days because they often had to walk miles through the mud to get to the clinic. Besides the mud and rocks, dodging cows was a daily occurrence, as seen above. Kenya has open range livestock and they are not afraid to share the road with motor vehicles. On one side of the road leading up to the clinic was rice fields as far as you can see (pictured bottom left). There were always people working the fields, even through the hottest part of the day. One of the villagers was nice enough to talk to us about the rice and show us what it looks like before it is processed.
The Mama Pilista clinic is a series of small connected buildings with a waiting area in the middle, all of which are on the lands owned by Dr. Bonyo’s family. Dr. Bonyo (featured on the right side of the top right corner) is the physician who was born in the village, got a medical education in the U.S. against all odds, and then returned to his home village to start a clinic. Everyone is admiring one of the babies that had just been born in the clinic in that picture. There was one room set up inside one of the buildings to see patients and one set up outside as featured in the last picture. Utilizing a translator was a challenge. They were wonderful at their jobs but it’s difficult to speak to a patient who doesn’t understand your language. Also, some words just don’t translate over. It’s pretty difficult to describe malaise and I consistently had a hard time trying to elicit whether or not the patient understood that chills were different than shivering when in a cold room. I never imagined that malaria and typhoid would be as common as the flu, and I’ll never forget them on my differential when someone has a pertinent travel history. I surprisingly saw a fair amount of breast masses, helped pull some teeth, and even saw a man with onchocerciasis! I gained so much more confidence in my clinical skills on this trip. It’s amazing how well you can adapt when you only have limited resources available to you.
These two dogs pictured above loved to hang around the clinic and always seemed to know when we were going to lunch. There were some village women who were kind enough to make us lunch every day. This normally consisted of chapati, sometimes white bread, and a tea that is best described as hot sweet tea. The picture on the top right is actually on Thanksgiving and they are all waiting in line to use the Nutella and peanut butter we brought to make a sandwich. The bottom left corner is one of my friends walking to the bathroom, which was my first experience with using a squat toilet. Farther back in that picture is a sign that says “Cough Zone”, which was supposed to be used by people with tuberculosis. The final picture is of one of the translators and myself. We got along so well after one of the first days that she always chose to work with me from that day forward. She is hoping to one day pursue a medical career, as well.
I just wanted to add in some more highlights of the trip. I could not get over how beautiful Lake Victoria was, no matter how many times I saw it. We were fortunate to be able to watch the sunset over the lake from a hilltop restaurant. After dark, though, the hippos come out of the water. Above is a picture of a male hippo staring at us while we were in a tour boat. After finishing up our time in clinic, we traveled to Masai Mara, learned about the Masai people, saw the border of Kenya and Tanzania, and went on a safari. Pictured here is a lion yawning only a few feet away from our van. The last picture is of a few of my friends who I’m proud to call my colleagues. I came back from this trip filled with new medical knowledge and a much better understanding of Kenya and its people. I also learned some lessons in patience, flexibility, and creativity. I feel more confident than ever in my decision to pursue global health and hope that I can return to the clinic someday.