

## India Trip Synopsis

For the last two years, TeamMED has taken 5-6 medical students from all years to Dharamshala, India; a region known for its lush mountains and hills bordering the Himalayas. To ensure sustainability and active engagement, we worked with *Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development (CORD)*, a local NGO, to research and develop an alcohol and drug prevention program for school students in the rural region of Himachal Pradesh. Throughout the last 2 years we:

- Visited 12 rural school and 1 university in rural Himachal Pradesh
- Delivered the alcohol and drug prevention program to 4 schools in Himachal Pradesh
- Conducted group discussion from school students ranging from year 5-12, totalling interactions with over 700 students!
- Visited the homes of 30 parents to discuss their views towards alcohol and drugs
- Conducted interviews with 10 women empowerment groups and elected representatives for 5 of them
- Visited 4 de-addiction centres to speak to patients and staff
- Visited 2 rural police stations
- Discussed drug and alcohol treatment with 1 psychologist

With all this information and practical experience, we actively fostered a more informed and open attitude towards drugs and alcohol in a region known for stigmatizing the use of addictive substances.

To continue this relationship with CORD, students will have the opportunity to follow up with the schools that previously received drug and alcohol education, to improve the program, as well as potentially adapting the program to younger year levels for a more upstream preventative solution.

Despite being a less clinically focussed project, the trip develops skills in preventative medicine, communication and motivational interviewing, whilst actively contributing to a sustainable project that has the potential to make a long-lasting difference to the lives of those in need.

To give you an idea of the problems in the region of Himachal Pradesh, I thought it would be beneficial for me to tell you a story that resonated with me from my time in Himachal Pradesh:

### Anecdote

*Whilst visiting various homes in a rural village to discuss alcohol and drugs, we happened upon one family consisting of a man (about 50 years old) and his wife (about 45 years old). From the man's body language, I could instantly tell he was reluctant to talk; he hid his face from us and tilted his body away. His wife remarked "He won't talk to anyone without alcohol". It was only after much convincing, we managed to get him to open up about his struggles with alcohol. He had first encountered it as a teenager and slowly followed the pathway of addiction, until he couldn't function without it. With tears in his eyes, he pleaded*

*with us for help, stating that he didn't have the funds to go to a psychologist or a get to a hospital. He described his life as being "torn apart" by alcohol and drug.*

This is just one of many stories, illustrating the problem with drugs and alcohol in Himachal Pradesh. With this program, we'll aim to counteract this so less people end up like this man.

On top of the project, you'll also have the chance to trek into the Himalaya's, eat Northern Indian food, drink lots of Chai and completely immerse yourself in a unique culture and lifestyle.