RUTGERS HEALTH
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School



Global Health Experience in South Korea

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Overview

I spent 3 weeks in Seoul shadowing Dr. Chae in Psychiatry, learning about his research, and exploring the country.







South Korea

- Current population: over 51 million people
- Seoul is the capital and home to more than 48% of the population (very densely populated)
- The low birth rate (0.78 births per person in 2023) is a significant concern for the rapidly aging population and has made pediatrics an unpopular specialty

Seoul St. Mary's Hospital

- A major teaching and research hospital affiliated with The Catholic University of Korea located in Seoul
- Part of Korea's largest healthcare network (CMC)





Dr. Jeong-Ho Chae

Ongoing Physician Strike

- Since February 2024, residents, interns, and attendings have resigned in reaction to a new government policy to increase the medical student quota
- The South Korean health finance system is characterized as "low premiums, low fees, low pay"
- Medical workers in certain specialties are overworked but underpaid causing more lucrative specialties to become predominant

Health in South Korea

- The National Health Insurance Service was established in 2000
- ~97% of the population has public health insurance
- The cost of healthcare is generally much lower than in the US and the government regulates pharmaceutical companies to keep costs low
- Medical students are taught both eastern and western practices in a comprehensive manner
- People value their physical health and use the many public parks which come with free exercise equipment
- Lung cancer is the highest cause of death, in relation to the prevalence of tobacco smoking
- Because of the high population density in Seoul, the medical care in rural areas is extremely limited
- South Korea has fewer physicians than most developed countries – 2.6 doctors per 1000 people





Mental Health Challenges

- The 2021 National Mental Status Report found that 1 in 4 South Koreans experience a mental illness at least once in their lifetime
- The number of patients with depression and anxiety have increased dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic
- There was a 90.2% and 78.5% increase in ***teens*** with depression and anxiety, respectively, from 2017 to 2021
- There was a 127.1% and 86.8% increase in ***people in their 20s*** with depression and anxiety, respectively, from 2017 to 2021
- The number of psychiatrists per 1000 people is only 0.08, ranked at the bottom of OECD countries
- South Korea has the fourth highest suicide rate in the world and the highest among OECD countries

**Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development*

SPECTRUM Therapy

- An approach to the use of different psychotherapies in an integrative method to address the specific mental health needs of South Koreans within the context of the healthcare system's capabilities
- **Sequential** – behavioral modules need to be implemented in a logical sequence and cycled as needed to ensure internalization
- **Practical** – this approach is a response to the disparity between the growing mental health concerns and the current lack of psychiatrists in the country
- **Eclectic** – psychotherapy should adapt to the unique needs of each patient and customize the process to them
- **Comprehensive** – treatments must not only be for symptomatic relief but also overall well-being in life
- **Transdiagnostic** – this approach recognizes that there are common factors in psychiatric disorders and addresses needs to not be limited by specific diagnoses
- **Resilient** – aims to go beyond symptomatic recovery and achieve the ability to maintain growth, adaptability, and maturation in the patient long-term
- **Uniformed –** the seven modules of SPECTRUM therapy are Acceptance, Change, Connection, Strength, Wisdom, Body, and Spirituality
- **Meditation** – an important mechanism to maintain well-being and a common undercurrent of each module
- In a country where mental health resources are rare, SPECTRUM aims to achieve holistic health

Conclusions

- I learned a lot from Dr. Chae and his staff about his approach to patient care and by speaking with him about the complexities of healthcare systems in different countries
- My medical Korean vastly improved





