

## One Month in Paradise: My experience working for Outer Cape Health Services in Wellfleet, MA

Cape Cod is a beautiful region of Massachusetts with a population of approximately 230,000 permanent residents, not including the islands of Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket. The population increases to over 500,000 residents during the summer months. I was lucky enough to spend the month of September living with a family in Provincetown, a town known for its largely gay and lesbian population in addition to its rich art and theater community. I have spent my whole life vacationing on the cape with my family, but had never spent any extended time there. Living there for a month was amazing not only because I got to wake up to the ocean outside my window, but also because I got to experience a place I've always loved from a totally new perspective.



Outer Cape Health Services (OCHS) is a non-profit community health provider on outer Cape Cod with outpatient centers in Harwich,

Wellfleet and Provincetown. They see approximately 19,000 patients per year and work primarily with Cape Cod Hospital in Hyannis, MA. Their Provincetown office is considered the most rural health center in MA because it's located 65 miles from Cape Cod Hospital, further from a hospital than any other clinic in MA. OCHS and Cape Cod Hospital are both affiliated with Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, so patients can see some specialists at OCHS clinics or at Cape Cod Hospital. OCHS physicians also staff Seashore Point in Provincetown, a ~40 bed acute rehab nursing facility and long-term assisted living facility.

OCHS offers an impressive amount of services despite its relatively remote location. Between their 3 clinics on the Cape, patients can get office appointments, x-rays and labs 7 days a week. In addition to suboxone programs at two of the sites and a dental office at one site, they also offer behavioral health and social workers at each clinic. Some nurse practitioners do home visits as well for patients who cannot make it into the office. The service they provide for their community is so great that OCHS recently received a \$20 million dollar federal grant to update their buildings and improve services even further.

I spent 4 weeks seeing patients at the busy Wellfleet office with Dr. Matthew Libby, a family doctor recently out of residency at Greater Lawrence Family Health Center. Given his recent start with OCHS, most of the patients we saw were urgent care visits from vacationers and permanent residents. The Wellfleet office is the oldest building of the 3 sites, built in the 1960's when OCHS first opened. There are 8 small exam rooms that are shared often between 7 providers (NPs, PAs and physicians). There is a tiny room designated for Quest Diagnostics to run their lab. Administrative space is tight as well but the staff was so welcoming that it felt more cozy than cramped.

In addition to working in Wellfleet I also spent a few days with Dr. Anne Marie Johnson at Seashore Point rehab and the Provincetown office, which has a younger, more diverse LGBT population. Some mornings I got to see patients with Dr. Barbara Prazak, the medical director of OCHS and UMass medical school alumna. She has worked with OCHS for over 30 years and was a great resource for learning more about working in primary care, particularly in a rural setting. She also knows everyone who lives on the Cape!

OCHS is a great learning environment for students interested in primary care, family medicine, or even emergency medicine because

OCHS often triages locals who do not want to go to the hospital and has a large volume of tourists during the summer. The patient population includes a wide variety of socioeconomic classes, from the homeless to famous entertainers, artists and politicians. You will experience the heroin epidemic that plagues many rural Mass communities firsthand. If you have an interest in caring for LGBT patient populations, you have ample opportunity to work with them. I also had opportunities to suture, perform pelvic exams, give IM injections, and even catheterize a patient. Dr. Libby is trained in osteopathic medicine and was an enthusiastic teacher of how to approach musculoskeletal issues in patients. A nice perk of the rotation is the flexibility you are given to design your own experience and schedule based on your interests. The OCHS patients, physicians and staff are very welcoming to medical students, and that alone makes it worth spending time with this great organization!

If you are interested in learning more about OCHS for an elective or have additional questions, feel free to contact me at  
[MargaretOliverio@gmail.com](mailto:MargaretOliverio@gmail.com).



Provincetown Center, as seen from my daily run



Dr. Barbara Prazak and Dr. Matthew Libby at the Wellfleet Clinic



Front of the Wellfleet Office (it's a bigger building than it looks, but not much)



Seashore Point residences and rehab facility.



The new Provincetown Office



A quiet afternoon on Commercial St. in Provincetown



Nauset Beach with some happy visitors (still went swimming despite daily great white shark sightings)





My visit was not complete without a visit to the vineyard in Truro.