

ANN HWANG

2004–05 AAAS Congressional Fellow

Ann Hwang’s educational background differs from most Fellows — while 90 percent hold PhDs, Ann has an MD. After receiving her degree from the University of California, San Francisco in 2003, she conducted research on reproductive health issues. When she had a few days off over the Christmas holiday, she used her time to read back issues of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. There, she saw a fellowships advertisement and decided immediately she wanted to apply, despite only having about 15 days to put her application together.

Fortunately, Ann finished in time and was awarded one of only two AAAS-sponsored Congressional Fellowships. She accepted a placement in the office of Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) and spent her fellowship working on global health issues, specifically funding for HIV/AIDS initiatives. “The biggest adjustment was operating on a different time scale. In the academic world, you take time to explore every angle before making decisions. On the Hill, you don’t have time, so you are flying by the seat of your pants!” she admits. The highlight of her year was participating in drafting a series of amendments that succeeded in increasing U.S. funding of global HIV/AIDS programs. She also met Mardge Cohen of WE-ACTx, an international, community-based organization dedicated to caring and advocating for HIV-positive women in Rwanda, who was testifying at a hearing.

Inspired by this encounter, Ann headed to Rwanda soon after finishing her fellowship to volunteer at a health clinic. For six weeks she experienced the HIV/AIDS crisis at the ground level. Ann recalls, “What I learned in Rwanda was how great the health care needs really are in developing countries. There’s so much to be done, with so few resources — the clinic didn’t have running water, and the electricity didn’t always work.”

In June 2006, Ann will be returning to the medical career she put on hold for the fellowship, starting her residency in internal medicine at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, MA. “The fellowship allowed me to understand the political process, which will help me be a better doctor and a better advocate for my patients,” she says.

