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Working in the third poorest district in South Africa and close to the poorest town has posed many challenges for Dr Will Mapham, but at the same time he describes it as an enriching and rewarding experience.

*"A hot shower would go a long way. After a day in the hospital you are often covered in blood and you can't even wash yourself properly. It can get you down every now and again."*

After graduating from the University of Cape Town, Mapham found himself doing his community service in Madwaleni, the Mbashe district of the Eastern Cape, about 45 minutes drive along a "bumpy dirt road" from Elliotdale.

"The area around the hospital is scattered with huts and subsistence farms. The people are very friendly and welcoming. Mbashe district is the birth place of Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Bantu Holomisa – there must be something in the water," Mapham quips.

Mapham often asks himself why he is staying. He lives in a small flatlet with no hot water, and he works long hours with not much professional support. However, he is drawn to the lifestyle. "I can canoe down the river or surf on the weekend or explore the beautiful inland," he says.

"I always vowed that I would work in a rural area," says Mapham, who declined the opportunity of studying in Edinburgh, opting to return home and study at home.

Mapham acknowledges that the scope for professional development is very limited although the province will pay for doctors to undertake various courses. The every day challenges are immense.

Health Journalist, Health-e

# a Doctor

## Will Mapham

of Madwaleni, Mbashe district of the Eastern Cape

*"A woman arrived with her face chopped off by a panga. She had no nose, no cheeks and her upper lip was gone. They had refused to take her at Umtata Hospital, so I spent three hours trying to sew her up even though I was not vaguely qualified. Luckily it seems to have gone well."*

He relays a story of how he was forced to practice plastic surgery although his skills were almost non-existent.

After completing his community service Mapham informed the authorities that he was keen to remain at the hospital. However, bureaucratic red tape saw him having to work for two months without pay until his posting was approved.

He welcomes the rural allowance, but wishes he could be paid for the many hours of overtime he put in.

"The Transkei has been written off so it is very easy to make a difference. I would not be able to make this kind of impact anywhere else," says Mapham.

The nurses he works with are "incredible", he adds.

"You couldn't work with nicer people. They really do their best for their community."

Mapham and another doctor (there are four), have managed to organise a high speed internet connection at the hospital, a move that has enabled them to enroll for Masters courses.

What would make him stay? "A hot shower would go a long way. After a day in the hospital you are often covered in blood and you can't even wash yourself properly. It can get you down every now and again."

*"In four years we could be specialists, out here you really have to solve problems yourself."*