

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

A report that addresses the above four objectives should be written below. Your Elective supervisor will assess this.

During my elective in Greece I was able to integrate into the general practice team at Rethymno Medical Assistance and gain experience in the Greek healthcare system, particularly primary care. I spent the majority of my time in the general practice surgery while also experiencing a number of days in the local hospital and a few days in a pharmacy. The general practice surgery was in a largely tourist area of the town, nestled among a number of large hotels, but it also served a population of local people in the area. The practice had two full time doctors with similar equipment to that which you would expect to find in the UK. This included a consultation room with an examination bed, stethoscopes, manual blood pressure devices, O2 saturation monitors, urine dipsticks and blood taking equipment. If blood samples were required on a non-urgent basis the patient would be sent to a nearby microbiologist but the GP also had the option to take a blood sample at the surgery if a more urgent result was required. In the GP surgery I initially spent time observing consultations in order to better understand the differences and similarities in the workings of primary care between Greece and the UK. I then went on to lead consultations under supervision while finally performing consultations by myself, usually with English speaking tourists, and discussing with the GP my proposed diagnosis and plan of action. Much like the UK, I also accompanied the doctors on home visits, which at this time of year, were commonly to hotels to treat unwell tourists but we did also visit the homes of some local patients.

From my experience, prevalent medical conditions managed within primary care in Greece appear to mirror quite closely the conditions that are commonly present in the UK system. Conditions that I saw commonly during my time in Greece included diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, depression, minor injuries, conjunctivitis, dermatological conditions as well as other bacterial and viral infections. This is a similar variety of conditions as compared to my experience of general practice in the UK. In Greece, general practice is primarily used for managing long term conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, a similar role to GP in the UK. However, in contrast to the UK, Greece does not have a general practice lead health care system. The individual patient can approach any doctor of their choice and access specialist services directly, rather than via referral from the GP. For example, a patient who believes they are suffering from diabetes can make an appointment with an endocrinologist of their choice without visiting the GP first. In addition, unlike the UK, healthcare in Greece is not free at the point of delivery and each doctor appointment comes with an associated fee. Coming from the UK, with only having experienced the NHS, seeing money being handed over in a doctors surgery took some time to get used to. In the past, GPs were not common place in Greece and all services were accessed directly by the patient. More recently it has become more common practice to attend a GP first rather than directly approaching a specialist but there remains a cultural difference in which some people prefer to see only specialists.

During my time in Greece I did not witness any active public health campaigns and I believe this could be related to the current economic climate. There was an initiative to encourage road safety while I was there. This was focussed on encouraging the use of seatbelts and took the form of television adverts. In the GP surgery there were posters to explain how to reduce cardiovascular risk and describing a healthy diet, however these were not country wide public health campaigns. My experience of the hospital setting demonstrated little evidence of active health campaigns, there

were no posters or leaflets to indicate any current public health campaigns. In addition, the pharmacy I visited did not have any material describing public health campaigns at the time. This is something I found quite in contrast to the UK where we commonly have a number of active public health campaigns, which are delivered through a number of mediums. I do believe the lack of public health campaigns in Greece is likely to be related to the poor economic climate where money is tight and cuts have had to be made.

Greek culture and history is rich and diverse. It is a culture of openness and kindness. I found everyone I met was friendly and I enjoyed eating local food and meeting local people. Greece has suffered from economic problems in recent times and continues to be in economic difficulty. However, I often found it difficult to realise this while I was there as the people are so generous, they will give whatever they have. This was usually some amazing home cooked food! As healthcare is not free at the point of delivery, I had concerns that difficult economic times would discourage some individuals from attending the doctor. However, talking to patients and the doctors I have come to understand that health is prioritised by most individuals and even in these difficult times patients have not been discouraged. I had the opportunity to visit a local organisation which collects unused medicines to supply the poor and homeless. The general public support these setups around the country very strongly and this once again demonstrates the generosity of Greek people. Greece has a proud history, particularly in relation to medicine and doctors are well respected in society. I found that there was less of a two way decision making process between patient and doctor but instead the patient wanted to be instructed what to do or what medicine to take. This is in contrast to the UK where we aim to make each consultation a two way conversation in which a shared decision is made. The Greek diet is generally very healthy with lots of fresh vegetables and most individuals appeared to be aware and conscious of their own health and wellbeing. I found that there was a general lack of physical exercise, particularly in the older generations, cars were commonly used even for short journeys. However, this culture appeared to be changing and the younger generation were physically very active.

I have had both an educational and enjoyable time in Greece. This was my first time experiencing a health care system other than the NHS and it was interesting to compare and contrast the differences and similarities. In addition, Greek hospitality is second to none and their culture was wonderful to experience and be a part of.