

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

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

From the first day on the burns unit, with one of the Consultants, I quickly realised how big and important a centre St. Andrews is in the UK. Being a burns 'centre' they are able to deal with the most serious, high percentage TBSA (total body surface area) burns in both adults and children. He told me that some units are small and are only able to deal with smaller percentage burns and don't treat children. Other units can treat higher percentage burns and can manage children with low percentage burns. Then there are burns 'centres' like St. Andrews which are set up to deal with any percentage burn in both adults and children. St. Andrews has had one of the best survival rates from burns out of any burns centre in the world (BBC, 2012). This is no surprise to me. It has been a real privilege to work and learn here.

Some of the other nearby units that I am now aware of include East Grinstead and Chelsea & Westminster, as well as others in the midlands and north of England.

In the first meeting I had with my tutor, which was prior to the start of the elective, he asked me which part of plastic surgery I was most interested in, and was keen to spend the most amount of time doing. I quite naively said I'm interested in the 'reconstructive part' of plastic surgery. Of course, this is most, if not all of what plastic surgery is, and I now realise that. Obviously, as well as reconstruction, there is cosmetic/aesthetic surgery which can still fall under the remit of plastic surgery but even this can be argued as still technically being reconstructive surgery.

I had 6 weeks to try and get the most out of the placement, 2 of these weeks I spent solely in burns; I spent a week in head and neck surgery, a week in cleft palate clinics/surgery in total, a week in hand surgery and trauma theatre and the final week in breast reconstruction. If I had any spare days/afternoons I normally went back down to the burns unit to do more cases in theatre.

From my perspective, regardless of what the reality is, it seems that St. Andrews Centre is run well and this is part of the reason well it is such a successful and well-regarded centre. I found that staffing levels in theatres were pretty good (perhaps not as good on the wards), but the trainees in plastics had nothing but good things to say, which is a positive sign that all the consultants are happy to mentor and properly train their juniors.

I can honestly say that this has been the best experience/ placement I have had as a medical student. I know that teaching is compulsory as part of my placements in MBBS, but having this elective where I could spend all my time, uninterrupted in theatres/ clinics and on the wards was a welcome change. I was able to get more out of the elective and build more meaningful working relationships with the more junior staff. This will set me up well for starting work as an FY1 in a couple of month's time. Certain things that we talked about included BAPRAS (British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons) and this will be an organisation for me to follow and eventually be part of.

It is interesting because if I have had a placement in a specialty at medical school which I have enjoyed, I would immediately consider that as a long term career option. Most have faded, but the

fact that I was considering plastic surgery even before being exposed to it, and now that I have, and enjoyed it, it seems good evidence that I would be happy in that specialty. Having an elective like this now has the potential to really guide my career in the medium to long term.

This was a key point highlighted in the final meeting with my tutor. One of the most important parts about being a doctor is building good relationships with your colleagues. If they are good, you will not only enjoy your work more but provide a better service to patients as teamwork will be better.

I was delighted when I got confirmation of this elective. During medical school, I have had surgical placements in general and colo-rectal surgery, trauma and orthopaedics but never plastics. I was therefore keen to get a taste of this specialty and explore the realities of this field. I fully appreciate the importance of both pre-op and post-op assessments which are crucial in management of each patient. The surgeon's job is only fleeting in a sense. Whilst the operation is vital, it is only a small part of a patient's overall 'journey' / recovery.

I have had good opportunities to scrub into surgery and assist different consultants/ fellows and registrars. I certainly feel more at home in theatre than when I first entered and tried scrubbing in my third year. I will continue to practice surgical skills, particularly in suturing, which is something I can do outside of the operating room. However, the best experience comes from being in theatre and learning from a more senior surgeon.

In terms of fulfilling my initial learning objectives, I believe my elective has done this and more. I have been able to practice surgical techniques and skills, learn more about burns services in the UK and specifically in Chelmsford and I have been able to work as part of the immediate team, particularly in burns care and also different sub-specialties within Plastic Surgery. Other things I would like to do in the future include coming back to St. Andrews, but also to get more involved with the research side of things, whether it be with an audit or helping write papers or getting involved with studies. I will hope to do relevant audits and projects during my FY1 and FY2 years at least to develop these research skills which is something I feel I need to work on.

Furthermore, looking to the future, I feel like this may well be the first step on starting a career in Plastic Surgery. It is with great pleasure that I thank the staff at St. Andrews Centre for Plastic Surgery and Burns, as well as my tutor in particular for this opportunity.