

ELECTIVE (SSC5a) REPORT (1200 words)

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

Medical elective at Universita Campus Bio-Medico di Roma

I was very fortunate to spend three weeks of my final year elective in Italy at a teaching hospital just outside Rome. My experience here enabled me to rotate through three main specialities: neurology, oncology and endocrinology. I thoroughly enjoyed this time and have learnt a lot from the experience, including observing a wide range of clinical diagnoses that I hadn't yet seen in my medical training to date in the UK. The opportunity to experience the Italian healthcare system and compare this with that of the United Kingdom (UK) was invaluable. From both first hand experience and discussions with students and doctors in the hospital, I have learnt a lot about the Italian healthcare system. It was enlightening in terms of clinical patient care, infrastructure, financing and assessment and management of a different population.

The hospital building itself was very modern and in-fact portrayed a very relaxing environment for both visitors and patients. We were informed that although Universita Bio-Medico is a public hospital, there is some private funding. I was made aware that there are differences in the standards of the Italian state run hospitals throughout the country. I was informed that the healthcare facilities in the North of Italy are considered better than those in the South and there are a mix of privately funded public hospitals. Throughout my time in the hospital, I noticed the personalisation of patient care and unlimited medical resources available to tailor this care.

It was eye opening to see and hear of the role of General Practitioners (GP) in Italy. The role of the specialists in hospital is much more predominant than that of the GP, in comparison with the UK. A GP will request necessary investigations and imaging which is then available for the specialist clinician reviewing the patient at their initial hospital appointment. The balance between community and hospital care is therefore more weighted towards the hospital, very different to the UK system. Another significant difference I found was that the patients bring their own medical records to appointments. It was interesting to see as this is not something which is seen in our UK system. At times in the UK, patient's will forget to bring their medication prescription, never mind a case of their notes and investigations, so it would be interesting to see how this would work in the NHS. Within the NHS, a patient must request their medical records in writing to the hospital. I feel there are definitely benefits to the system used in Italy and I imagine it certainly provides increased patient autonomy and education towards their medical care.

From my limited experience at Universita Campus Bio-Medica, the population of patients seen was predominately caucasian Italians. This is very different to the patient groups we see in the UK and in particular in London, where the population is very diverse in terms of ethnicity and social background.

In terms of medical education and training, it was interesting to hear about the difference in training pathways in Italy. Following a 6 year medical degree, you then choose which specialty you would like to train in. Specialist training then usually takes 4-5 years. A specialist is then seen as equivalent to consultants in the UK. It appears more of these specialists will go on to complete a PhD to further their training in the chosen specialty, something not seen as often across all specialities of medicine in the UK. Although this pathway reduces exposure to general medicine and surgery, I suppose it enables clinicians to focus on their chosen specialty and provides more time for research and development in their training.

I really enjoyed my experience in oncology as this is a specialty we haven't had much exposure to throughout medical school. Universita Campus Bio-Medica is the equivalent of a UK tertiary centre for oncology and, for example, is a specialist sarcoma unit. The team were extremely welcoming and very competent clinicians. Again, it was lovely to see the personalisation of care to each patient and the holistic approach and management this team provided. It was fascinating to attend the rare disease clinics, in fact one patient had a condition which only affects 1 in 5 million people. Although emotional, it was interesting to have this exposure to sarcoma patients being managed by the specialists in this field. It was also interesting to see other oncology cases, and I remember examining an 80 year old lady who had very advanced breast cancer which she delayed seeing anyone for. I had never had the experience of examining such an evident breast tumour and the lymph nodes it had metastasised to. A skill which I

will continue to build upon throughout my medical training.

The cases I came across in neurology were also very interesting, one in particular was a male patient who on the morning ward round was showing signs of an acute stroke. He had right sided hemiparesis and showed very little cognitive function. He had an urgent CT scan there and then, and it was amazing to see the team work together to treat this patient as quickly as possible.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I unfortunately missed my endocrinology placement during medical school and was very grateful for the experience in this specialty. It was exciting to see endocrine cases which I had learnt the theory of but hadn't had the opportunity to see in clinical practice. The clinics were significantly varied including cases of thyroid malignancies, bone metabolism and osteoporosis and also but not limited to preparing patients for bariatric surgery. I also learnt that in Italy endocrinologists carry out ultrasound FNAs and core biopsies themselves, a role predominantly managed by radiologists in the UK. It was an excellent experience to see an ultrasound clinic of both benign and malignant thyroid cases, witnessing FNA and core biopsies being carried out there and then. I believe seeing the pathophysiology of endocrinology being used in practice with patients and seeing how they are managed, will be very helpful in my upcoming foundation training.

I have definitely learnt the importance of international healthcare and the significance of recognising the similarities and differences of the systems used across the world. In the world of medicine I feel it is essential to have experience in different systems, cultures and populations in order to be able to provide the most up to date and innovative care possible.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the elective experience and it was exciting and interesting to experience medicine in a different healthcare system. The private funding used in the public services, at least at this hospital, does appear to have an impact on the infrastructure and resources available to clinicians and therefore provision of care to patients. It does indeed highlight the limits we sometimes experience within the NHS due to lack of funding and efficiency of management within the system. My experience at Università Campus Bio-Medica is one I will not forget and the skills I have learned will be integral throughout my future career in medicine.