

ELECTIVE (SSC5a) REPORT (1200 words)

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

Spending three weeks at the Surgery Department of the Nicosia Polyclinic Hospital in Cyprus has been a unique and beneficial experience. I had the opportunity to improve skills gained during my medical studies and acquire new skills in an area of my interest, Orthopaedic Surgery. My exposure allowed me to appreciate the pattern of musculoskeletal conditions in Cyprus and identify some main contributing factors. Also, noteworthy, Cyprus has recently developed a national health system to provide free and accessible care to all its Citizens. During my 3-week placement I was able to identify both differences and similarities compared to the NHS and draw my own conclusions on the strengths and weaknesses of each one.

I have shadowed three Orthopaedic Surgery consultants during my time at the Nicosia Polyclinic Hospital. This was the first time finding myself shadowing Surgeons not trained in the UK and, thus, an opportunity to compare different treatment approaches. I find that the biggest difference lies in the fact that Cyprus has no standardised guidelines for treating common conditions and consequently doctors follow the gold-standard management approaches of the country they received training at. It was interesting to observe how each surgeon handles their consultations and time in the operating theatre with the common aim of providing the best possible care to the patient. I improved my knowledge in common medical conditions, such as low back pain, while at the same time I built on essential surgical skills, such as debriding a wound, suturing in various methods, and managing both open and closed fractures. In addition to learning and improving on practical skills, I had the opportunity to hone my non-technical skills by working within large multidisciplinary teams both in clinics and in the operating theatre. I find that my time with the Orthopaedic team allowed me to develop my professional and academic skills and form a well-rounded image of what this specialty entails.

Approximately 1.71 billion people have musculoskeletal conditions worldwide (21% of global population), of which about one-third is attributed to low back pain. This pattern is no different in Cyprus as musculoskeletal conditions contribute significantly to disability by limiting mobility and dexterity, creating barriers professionally, impacting mental health and affecting social encounters. The most senior consultants were able to describe in their own experience how the increasing and ageing population leads to a subsequent rise in the prevalence of musculoskeletal conditions. Upon reading on the subject, I found epidemiological articles speculating that this increase in prevalence will continue for at least another decade. Furthermore, following my 3-week placement and upon looking at many different cases, I speculate that risk factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and obesity also play a key role in developing musculoskeletal disorders in Cyprus.

Notably, Cyprus has recently established a national health service, the General Health System (GHS), celebrating its 3-year anniversary this month. As I was born and raised in Cyprus, I have experienced first-hand healthcare provision before its establishment, both as a patient and during some work placements and voluntary work. Such a complex reform has probably not happened in Cyprus for more than 50 years. One can imagine that this does not come without challenges – particularly considering that medical professionals had to embrace a shift from an almost-only private service provision to a national one. This not only meant that they had to accommodate more patients in a given amount of time, but also had to deal with the regulations of the new service. Moreover, in the middle of this big change, the newly formed health service had to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinating its efforts both internally and externally, while continuing to grow.

Polyclinic Nicosia Hospital has joined GHS last year, so I had the opportunity to experience first-hand how the national health system was embraced at a mid-sized hospital that used to be private. I have spoken with several doctors on this topic, but most interestingly with a surgeon who has published his PhD thesis on how doctors have perceived this change. I was intrigued to learn that most doctors are happy with the new working conditions, but find it difficult to communicate with the GHS for raising concerns or solving issues. Furthermore, upon discussing with a UK qualified doctors we have summarised the main differences of Cyprus GHS with the UK NHS. I believe most of them are due to the difference in total population, with

Cyprus being 60 times smaller. This allows the patient to be able to select their own doctor both for primary and secondary care. While this nurtures a competitive environment between specialists, it pushes everyone to perform at their best. However, it does lack the coordination of the NHS particularly when the patient is referred to other services. Moreover, it still offers only basic healthcare services, limiting them to GP, Specialist, Dentist, and Physiotherapy, while also there is a gap in training as specialist training is only offer for a scarce number of specialties.

My 3-week elective placement in Cyprus has been intriguing, allowing me to develop both professionally and personally. I observed first-hand how the new general health system works and discussed with several doctors on this topic. Furthermore, the practical skills I learnt deem me more prepared than ever to step into the Foundation Year 1 doctor role this August.