

## **ELECTIVE (SSC5a) REPORT (1200 words)**

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

Words can't begin to explain how magical this little island is. Having had the opportunity to spend the last 3 weeks here has been one of the greatest pleasures of my life. On the first day of this placement I was terrified on the way to the hospital as the only healthcare system I had ever known and trained in was the NHS, so coming abroad to this system with such different guidelines and working styles was definitely a shock to the system. But with all the differences seen there were many unequivocally similar practices, such as the act of a consultant leading a ward round with the registrar and other junior doctors following in close tandem. Something that really impressed me with the doctors here was just how empathetic and caring they were with their patients, during the ward rounds they would spend vast periods of time with each individual patient - talking to them and making sure that their concerns and expectations were heard. Which is something that doctors back in the UK can be quite guilty of not doing, seemingly rushing through the ward rounds. Another aspect of an important trait that junior doctors here carry is the fact of how polite and respectful they are with other members of the multidisciplinary team where they always acknowledge any points or issues raised by other members of the team.

Interestingly, the medical system here in Tobago seems to be more of a hybrid between the American and British systems. With a lot of the medical guidelines utilised here following the NICE and BMJ best practices. I suppose this is testament to the fact that this little island is a part of the Commonwealth. The American part of the system comes from the fact that the junior doctors here which are the equivalent of an F1 are called interns and there are also attending doctors who are the equivalent of a registrar back in the UK. During my time on this elective, I was fortunate enough to not only see what life was like on the adult medicine ward but also in A&E where some of our patients were being managed. I must say I was very impressed with how modern and efficient the A&E was, there are definitely hospitals back in the UK which could learn a thing or two about how to run an A&E as streamlined and efficient as here. With any medical structure the patient was always kept at the centre of care and always had support readily available and close by should they ever have needed it.

However, there are aspects of the Tobagan system that are less than ideal. This includes the fact that all patient files and documentation are still hand written and more frustratingly additional copies of them are not kept. So if a file were to go missing then, the patient's entire clinical file would disappear. Another challenge with having handwritten notes is the fact that at times I found the writing on the paper to be illegible and I struggled to really grasp and understand the specific details of the case and that meant I was not able to apply my knowledge fully to each case and I was always left guessing particular aspects of the case. I would say this may pose a possible patient safety issue, because even if a certain drug dosage prescriptions were to be illegible to the clinician administering the drug this could have catastrophic adverse effects for the patient.

Another challenge I did find myself experiencing was actually deciphering the Trinidad and Tobago accents, sometimes they were so thick that it almost sounded like a different language to me. And that's completely on me for not being able to understand them as other students on the elective who I spoke to were able to understand most clinicians here without a hitch. For me the reason I struggled the most was predominantly also due to the fact that there was strict use of facial masks in all areas which meant that it

made most people's voices even more muffled and harder to understand. But over the course of the 3 weeks, I must say I did get a lot better in understanding all the staff and by the end I was able to understand and comprehend all bits of information that was being discussed on ward rounds and spoken to me.

Overall, I think I managed to accomplish a majority of my intended objectives I set myself prior to arriving on the island. Looking at how resources are allocated to internal medicine on the island, I use the example of dialysis machines. On the island there is a high incidence of renal pathologies necessitating the use of dialysis machines for a large cohort of patients. The causality of this large incidence rate is primarily due to two predominant reasons: hypertension and diabetic nephropathy. However this is where the problems start, the island has a sufficient number of these dialysis machines to be able to cope and manage its number current dialysis patients, but there just is not enough staff to run and operate these machines. Thus leaving these crucial machines to sometimes lie completely un-utilised even though there are patients actively waiting their turn for their weekly dialysis sessions. The issue stems from a lack of staff training and retention of said staff. In Tobago there is unfortunately no opt-in or opt-out system for organ donation, in fact there is no organ donation register on this island. Which is why even patients with chronic kidney disease stage 4 or 5, who require frequent dialysis sessions have no avenue out of it with the hope of receiving an organ transplantation. Even the use of continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis is rare here with not many patients having access to this form of dialysis. All these factors as a whole contribute to add to the stress and challenges that are placed on the healthcare system here in Tobago.

To end, I can't begin to thank the team at Scarborough General Hospital for their hospitality and patience with me over the last three weeks. To be able to get an insight into a healthcare system a world away from back home in the UK has indubitably made me a better doctor and I hope to apply the various things I have learnt on this elective to my practice when I start as a doctor this coming July.