

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 time on the Amazon Hope Ship, I saw hundreds of patients in clinic. From this experience, the most common conditions that I encountered were Influenza, skin infections, musculoskeletal pain and gastrointestinal infections. The most common type of skin infection I encountered was fungal e.g. tinea versicolor, tinea corporis and tinea pedis. These skin presentations would often be seen in multiple members of the same family. The lack of adequate sanitation available to the communities of the Loreto region allows these infections to flourish and unfortunately can be chronic. The most common occupation in the Loreto region is Agriculture. This job is very physically demanding and unfortunately results in chronic muscle and joint pain amongst the adult population. Finally, GI infections are extremely prevalent in the local communities of the Amazon. This is due to lack of clean drinking and bathing water. The range of infections include those caused by parasites (giardiasis), amoebas and bacteria.

There is almost no healthcare provision to the communities of the vast Loreto Region of the Peruvian Amazon. As a result, the region has some of the worst health data in the country of Peru. Some of the bigger communities will have Health Posts. These are small clinics, staffed by a nurse or maybe a doctor, that can provide extremely basic healthcare to the locals. However, they are not consistently staffed with flooding often impacting the ability of healthcare staff to travel to these posts to work. The medical equipment and medicine stocks are limited. If the community is lucky enough to have one of these health posts, they will have to pay out of pocket for any treatments they receive which is something a lot of the locals cannot afford to do. Of course, this system is in stark contrast to the healthcare infrastructure we are so lucky to have in the United Kingdom in which healthcare is not only readily available but also free to all at the point of care.

As a result, the communities rely heavily on the Amazon Hope Ship for healthcare provision. However, the boat only visits each community about once every 3-4 months making chronic disease management almost impossible.

As discussed previously, the healthcare provision is extremely limited in the Loreto region. Therefore, it is difficult to isolate just one public health issue as being the “biggest” facing the region. Lack of access to clean water is one of the major issues facing the region. Families bathe, wash clothes and swim in the waters of the Amazon River. This leads to high numbers of parasite and amoeba infections in childhood. As well as this, it results in the refractory nature of many skin infections as the affected areas are unable to be cleaned properly. Amongst the younger population, these waterborne gastrointestinal infections can lead to faltering growth and malnourishment. In an attempt to combat this, all children who are seen on the Amazon Hope ship are treated with multivitamins and anti-parasites.

Another major public health concern in the region is poor dentition. There is no dental-care provision in these communities and knowledge around adequate oral care is extremely poor. The Amazon Hope team aims to combat this by performing dental procedures on board the ship as well as education workshops in the local schools.

My time on the ship was an extremely insightful and educational experience. Not only did I strengthen my general medical knowledge and skills but, I learned a lot about the culture of the Loreto region and Peru in general. Prior to this trip I had very little Spanish, having not studied the language at school. However, through my many patient encounters, with the help of the wonderful translators on board, and

interactions with my Peruvian colleagues, my level of Spanish has greatly improved. I am more confident in my ability to have brief conversations in Spanish which will help me a lot while traveling in Spanish speaking countries. I have also acquired some medical Spanish which I hope to continue to learn and use in my future career as a doctor when volunteering.