

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

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

The general surgery presentations seen in St Vincent & the Grenadines are largely similar to those seen in the United Kingdom. Amongst the most common surgeries performed are appendicectomy, cholecystectomy, hernia repairs and surgeries to treat gastro-oesophageal reflux disease. As with general surgery in the UK, there is a relatively high prevalence of GI cancer and breast cancer. However, sadly, due to a lack of appropriate screening programmes and general lack of engagement with healthcare, these diseases often present late and therefore, surgery is often not an option.

The delivery of general surgery services to patients in St Vincent and the Grenadines is not dissimilar to the UK. Patients with less acute, more chronic conditions will be referred to general surgery by their doctor. These patients will be seen in clinic and scheduled for elective surgery if needed. Those patients with more acute general surgery presentations will present to the Emergency Department and be operated on as an emergency case. However, unlike most hospitals in the NHS, the general surgeons in Milton Cato Hospital in Kingstown (main hospital for the island of St Vincent) do not operate everyday. Elective general surgery theaters only occur on one or two days per week. With limited operating days and emergency cases taking priority, this means that wait lists for elective surgeries can be extremely long. As is also the case in the UK, patients have the option to access private healthcare for their elective surgeries in order to avoid waiting long periods of time for their operation. However, this is a privilege that many Vincentian's sadly cannot afford.

From my experience of healthcare provision in St Vincent & the Grenadines it seems that the main barrier to accessing healthcare is two-fold; lack of adequate service provision and low household income. There is simply not enough capacity within the main hospital on the island to treat everyone who needs to be treated. This is highlighted by the small number of theaters in the hospital being shared by various surgical specialties resulting in a limited number of operating days per specialty. This limited capacity creates a second barrier in the form of socio-economic status. Those few individuals who are lucky enough to have a higher household income can bypass this first barrier by paying large sums of money for private healthcare. However, the average household income in St Vincent is not enough to be able to afford this luxury. In order to increase access to healthcare for all Vincentians there needs to be an improvement in health infrastructure throughout to the country.

My final objective of this elective was to improve my basic surgical skills. In my mind prior to this elective, this would have included procedures that I had learned during my degree such as suturing and scrubbing in. Unfortunately, theatre time for students was very limited and as a result most of my clinical exposure was in the form of surgical clinics as opposed to surgeries.