

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

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

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in the Nephrology department of Evangelismos hospital so far! My third year of medical school was significantly impacted by the pandemic, and I missed out on my renal placement at Barts. I was therefore glad to have the opportunity to learn more about the speciality before starting FY1.

Evangelismos hospital is one of the largest public hospitals in the Balkans and is located in the centre of Athens. The Greek healthcare system comprises a mix of public and private providers, and Greece has one of the highest ratios of doctors to population in the EU. The number of specialist doctors is particularly high, with a relative shortage of family doctors or GPs (<https://www.ekathimerini.com/society/221371/a-greek-malady-too-many-doctors-too-few-gps/>). Unfortunately, the public healthcare system was heavily impacted by austerity measures implemented following the financial crisis in the late 2000s. Alongside lack of funding, another issue facing Greeks is access to healthcare in remote areas. At Evangelismos, I learnt that it is common for Greek medical graduates to spend a year working as a 'rural doctor', often on one of the country's 227 inhabited islands, before starting their residency training.

Dr Giannopoulou and her colleagues in the Nephrology department were all very welcoming, and more than happy to involve me in their daily routines and offer some teaching when the opportunity arose. Being half-Greek, but not fully bilingual, I appreciated the opportunity to practice the language, much of which was unsurprisingly similar in medicine!

The day would typically begin with a meeting in the staff room, attended by the 10 or so nephrologists, in which they would discuss the various patients.

Unlike the sometimes fragmented nature of team dynamics I have observed in the NHS, exacerbated by shift work, locums, and frequent rotations, the nephrology department had a distinctly cohesive feel. The doctors seemed to know each other very well, both professionally and personally, which translated into a familiar working environment. I was invited to attend several ward rounds, which were much larger than those I had attended in the UK, with the director leading the entire department from bed to bed.

During my time in the nephrology department, I had the chance to practice several clinical skills. I revisited the fundamental task of manually measuring blood pressure with a sphygmomanometer, something I hadn't done since the early years of medical school. I also took blood samples alongside nurses during their ward rounds. Additionally, I observed and practiced using ultrasound to measure the diameter of the inferior vena cava to estimate fluid status, a technique used to manage the complex fluid needs of post-transplant patients. I was also able to manually palpate the abdomens of transplant patients, whose allograft kidneys lie in the iliac fossae.

Spending time in the transplant outpatient clinic and haemodialysis unit gave me a better insight into the challenges of life as a renal patient. I was reminded of the various immunosuppressant medications transplant patients must take, and the regular malignancy screening they must undergo (dermatologist check-up, gastroscopy, colonoscopy, CXR). Whilst in the haemodialysis unit, I also learnt about the challenges of matching patients with end-stage renal disease to a suitable organ donors, and the logistical and ethical difficulties in organising an effective allocation system.

I also had the opportunity to observe various procedures, including five kidney biopsies and the insertion of a central venous catheter. Watching these procedures highlighted the intricate skills and precision required in medicine. Ultrasound guidance, only relatively recently introduced in this context, is useful for accurately targeting the biopsy site, minimizing complications, and ensuring the safety of the patient. I was able to appreciate the importance of good communication skills during these procedures, as patients are often anxious and must be encouraged to remain very still for the sample to be taken. It was also interesting to accompany the doctors taking one of the samples to the histopathology laboratory, where it was immediately examined under microscope to assess whether it was an adequate sample (contained sufficient glomeruli).

To conclude, my time in the Nephrology department of Evangelismos was stimulating, providing me with an insight

into the Greek public healthcare system and the field of renal medicine. It has helped me gain an appreciation for an organ often poorly understood by medical students, and has inspired me to ensure I develop my knowledge of the specialty before starting F1.