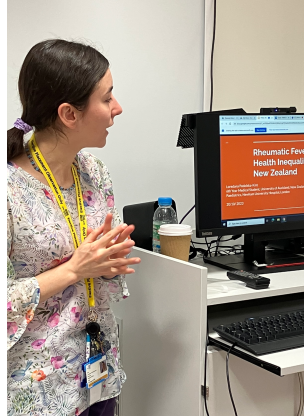


Flavell Bequest Scholarship Report

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With my supervisor, Dr Farah Sheikh



Giving a presentation on rheumatic fever



Reading poetry to children at West Hampstead Library



Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon

Introduction

I was overjoyed and honoured to receive one of two Geoffrey And Joan Margaret Flavell Bequest Elective Scholarships from Queen Mary University of London and The Barts And London Charities Trust. Thanks to the Scholarship, I was able to complete a much-dreamed-of overseas Elective, which would have been financially unfeasible for my family after the challenges of the recent COVID-19 lockdown periods. My eight weeks of placement in the Paediatrics department of Newham University Hospital (NUH) from the 28/8/2023 - 20/10/2023 under the excellent guidance of my supervisor Dr Farah Sheikh and the warm-hearted and inclusive Paediatrics team was a time of exponential learning and clinical experience. London was also a place of great learning, artistic appreciation, and growth for me as a writer.

Clinical Experience

I spent time at "Rainbow Ward" (inpatients), paediatric A&E, outpatient clinics, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and community clinics at West Ham Lane Clinic and Lord Lister Clinic. I met children and families from all walks of life and of the world, assessed and presented patients, and even went to deliveries and Caesareans to observe neonatal resuscitation. There was bountiful departmental and student teaching, of an excellent calibre.

The most common inpatient conditions included bronchiolitis, viral wheeze, asthma, meningitis, diabetic ketoacidosis, appendicitis, and constipation. More unusual cases included Kawasaki disease, Meckel's diverticulum, hypoplastic left heart syndrome, sickle cell anaemia, autoimmune demyelinating encephalomyelitis, and neurofibromatosis. I also experienced the "sad side" of Paediatrics for perhaps the first time, meeting patients with cancer, severe cerebral palsy, congenital conditions, palliative genetic conditions, mental health conditions, and non-accidental injuries. While I found these conditions confronting, I was also very touched by how the hospital services nestled around the children and their families, and was inspired by the resilience that the

children tended to display. I impressed myself with my own maturity and professionalism, and discovered that despite this “sad side,” I view Paediatrics as the specialty with the most hope and fulfilment, because through a small action, we can impact the child’s entire medical trajectory and even the health and wellbeing of entire families.

In NUH, I was able to engage with all members of the multidisciplinary team, including the play specialists, play assistants, nurses, midwives, doctors, reception staff, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech-language therapists, and dieticians. Due to the way my New Zealand clinical rotations were structured, the work of those other than doctors and nurses was mostly a “black box” to me, and so, I clung onto every pearl of wisdom from these moments.

I was also able to participate in some teaching, which was of great value to me as I have always known I wish to participate in teaching when I am a doctor. I was an examiner in the end-of-run Mock OSCE for the 4th Year students and role-played in their teaching sessions. This also put me in another’s shoes, making me consider the perspectives of patients and parents in a new way. On the final day of my Elective, I gave a presentation on rheumatic fever and health inequities in New Zealand, and my own reflections on how ethnic health inequities and the history of colonisation may be relevant to clinical practice in London and particularly Newham, the most culturally diverse and also deprived borough. This presentation was well-met and served to consolidate my own learning and reflections on the impact of cultural, historical, and environmental factors on health, especially in the Paediatric sector.

Personal Development

As well as enforcing my interest in the specialty of Paediatrics, being on my Elective helped me confirm the *kind* of doctor I wish to be. Through observing a range of doctors at different stages in their careers, I was able to choose my own role models, and keenly observe the qualities I wished to emulate. The consideration and caring shown by all the doctors towards patients and families also extended to creating a considerate and inclusive team environment, all of which contributed to my own renewed enthusiasm for becoming a doctor in a few months’ time.

In NUH, I was restricted to an “observership” role, and this was initially a challenge in itself. This was a significant change to my recent role as a Trainee Intern in Whangārei Hospital, rife with staffing shortages, and with the added pressure of a quest for adequate references for my PGY1 year. I always feel the need to be “useful” and visibly so, in order to achieve the supervisor marks I crave. Medical students experience a toxic productivity culture which pushes us to stay late, do more long days than we are required, study too long, and sacrifice our personal lives to the deity that is medical school. However, my Newham supervisor encouraged me to prioritise my own learning and development during my time in London. It took time to adjust my way of thinking and accept that prioritising myself was not “relaxing,” and “relaxing” was also not a crime. Thanks to this, I was able to expand my learning and make all the personal discoveries detailed in this report.

Poetry

As someone who calls herself one-half poet and one-half medical student, England was a poet’s paradise to me. It was a humbling but immensely inspiring experience to walk the same streets as the most eminent names in English literature. I made poetic pilgrimages to the homes of my favourite author Charles Dickens, my favourite poet John Keats, and spent hours in Poets Corner, Westminster Abbey, among the graves and memorials of the famous names whose work I had grown up reading. I did day trips on weekends to places of literary significance, such as Oxford, the home of my favourite childhood authors Philip Pullman and C. S. Lewis; Cambridge, home of

authors such as A. A. Milne; and Stratford-upon-Avon, birthplace and resting place of the great William Shakespeare. Of course, I also visited Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to see Macbeth.

The Keats House Museum Poetry Ambassadors invited me to participate in their Black History Month event, where I was one of four people reading poems by eminent Black British and Black American poets. I was also invited by an officer of Camden Council, Sajjad Ali, to give a poetry reading at West Hampstead Library, where I read from my own self-published children's book, 'What Are You Made Of?' This was a highlight of my trip as I find it fulfilling to inspire children to interact with poetry and medical ideas, and they were the first-ever audience of one of my new poems, 'If You Want To Be A Doctor.'

To ensure I would make the most of the poetic opportunities in store, I set a goal of writing a poem every day during my Elective, and a selection of these can be read in an accompanying document. My poetry output has been patchy throughout medical school, with flashes of inspiration often unfortunately conflicting with the priorities of study and clinical placements. Thus, it was invaluable to be able to set aside dedicated time for writing. I returned to New Zealand full of inspiration and enthusiasm for writing, with a renewed intent to continue to incorporate poetry alongside my future work as a doctor.

Outside the Hospital

I made the most of the other diverse cultural, historic, and artistic learning experiences available in London, visiting virtually every single museum and art gallery. I had always been fascinated by history, and my understanding of British history was exponentially improved through visiting locations such as The Tower of London and The Imperial Maritime Museum. Seeing the Rosetta Stone at the British Museum was another highlight, as it was an object I had read about with fascination as a child. Music being one of my other hobbies, I attended several musicals, the Don Quixote ballet at the Royal Opera House, an orchestral concert at the Royal Albert Hall, and a performance of Iolanthe by the English National Opera. My appreciation of the visual arts was greatly improved through the time I spent in locations such as The National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, The Courtauld, and Ranger House. These marvels greatly coloured my own writing during this time.

Travelling to the United Kingdom also led me to reconnect more strongly with my own roots. I spent one weekend in Wales, visiting a Polish cousin whom I had not seen since we were both toddlers, and it was incredibly special to reconnect with this side of my family tree. After leaving London, I passed briefly through Germany, visiting an elderly uncle, who I had not seen for many years and who, due to health, is unlikely to ever visit New Zealand again. Aside from these visits, being overseas on my own for the first time led me to value my own family so much more, and I spent time reflecting on the kind of daughter I wanted to be to my parents when I became a doctor. And when visiting the majestic churches and cathedrals of London, I was often moved to reflect upon my grandparents, all of whom had passed away before I finished high school, and I reflected on how proud they would be for studying medicine and receiving this Scholarship.

Conclusion

Receiving the Flavell Scholarship enabled me to experience all the facets of Paediatrics, discover more about myself, and gave me access to the inspirational literary, historic, musical, and artistic scenes of London, shaping me as a person, a doctor, and a writer. I would like to conclude by sincerely thanking Queen Mary University of London and The Barts And London Charities Trust for their Scholarship, and to extend a heartfelt thank you to my supervisor Dr Farah Sheikh and the entire Newham University Hospital Paediatrics Department.