

ELECTIVE (SSC5c) REPORT (1200 words)

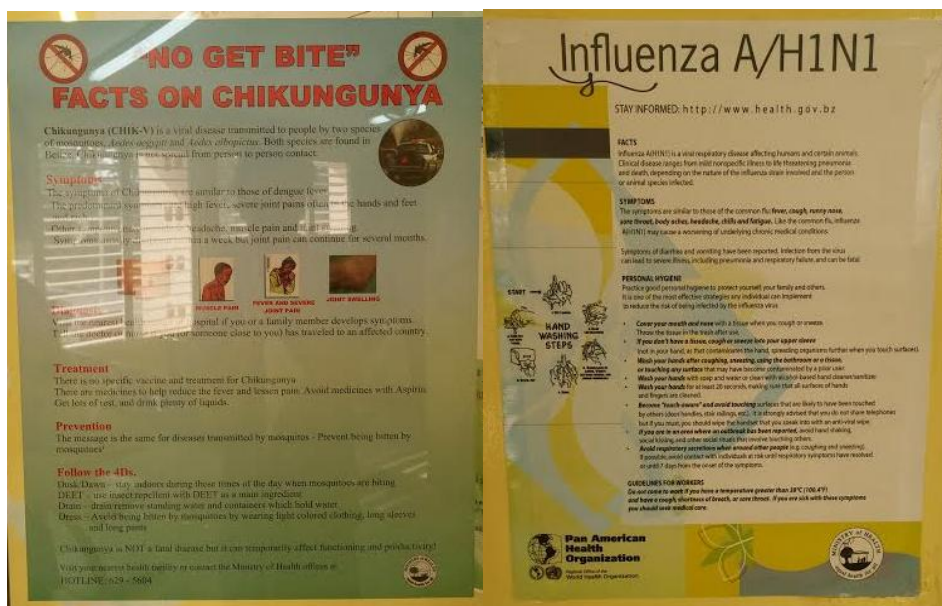
A report that addresses the above four objectives should be written below. Your Elective supervisor will assess this.

Describe the pattern of disease/illness of interest in the population with which you will be working and discuss this in the context of global health: What are the common problems facing maternity medicine in the Belmopan district of Belize?

Belize is a country which is demographically, geographically and socially different from the United Kingdom. As such the pattern of disease seen throughout the country, in many ways, is unlike that found in the United Kingdom. In terms of maternal medicine many of the problems are related to difficulty in provision of services as opposed to different organic problems that we would see in England.

There are a number of medical conditions which are prevalent in Belize. Of note Belize has the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. This has a particular impact on maternal health and there is much focus on reducing vertical transmission. Other diseases are related to poor sanitation such as gastroenteritis and cholera. Infectious diseases are a particular concern including malaria, dengue fever.

I learnt of a number of new conditions such as Chikungunya, a viral disease transmitted by infected mosquitoes which is clinically similar to dengue fever. I was also surprised to see awareness campaigns for Avian Flu.



Describe the pattern of health provision in relation to the country which you will be working and contrast this with other countries, or with the UK: Describe the provision of maternity care in Belize and compare/contrast with the UK.

Healthcare in Belize is delivered by both public and private providers. The public system in which I was based is overseen by The Ministry of Health. Due to the small population size it is impossible to offer affordable high level care in all regions therefore specialised care is based at specific centres meaning patients requiring such intervention need to be transferred long distances. In total there are eight government and five private hospitals with inpatient facilities. Many of the doctors spend at least one day a week at polyclinics in rural communities which provide an accessible first point of care.

There was a period of time in which we had very few patients in the hospital, interestingly the reason for this was that the US ship USNS Comfort was docked in Belize as part of the American Continuing Promise. The civilian and military personnel aboard through partnership with the Ministry of Health provided a variety of outpatient medical, dental, preventive medicine, and health education services.



Clearly the structure and provision of care in Belize is very different to the structure and delivery of healthcare in the United Kingdom and in truth is very difficult to compare as I have not been based in any hospitals which cater to a similar sized population. Broadly however I found that basic surgical, anaesthetic and medical practices were similar. The starkest differences were in the facilities available and staffing levels. For example imaging was essentially solely x-ray, intensive care beds had no specialised equipment and almost all healthcare professionals were generalists.

Health related objective: Outline potential public health measures to improve maternal and fetal health in Belize

The Western Regional Hospital where I was based is a certified Mother Baby Friendly Hospital. This has been achieved through the successful implementation of the 10 specific steps to support successful breastfeeding. The impact of this was seen widely through the hospital through posters, leaflets and health promotion by the staff. See below. The initiative is a global programme sponsored by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Children's Fund, and having met this standard was a particular point of pride in the maternity unit.



Personal/professional development goals: Experience maternal medicine in a resource poor setting, and explain how this has been beneficial for me as a healthcare professional

Working with such a welcoming and friendly group of health professionals and patients made this medical elective particularly enjoyable. At times it was certainly challenging working with limited facilities and this has certainly given me an appreciation for the variety of equipment and techniques at our disposal in the United Kingdom. On the other hand working under these conditions enabled me to improve my diagnostic skills especially with the wider spectrum of differential diagnoses than I am used to considering!

