

ELECTIVE (SSC5c) OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVES SET BY SCHOOL

1 The Royal London Hospital is a nationally renowned trauma centre, and as such there is a large amount of trauma cases attending the hospital. Therefore my exposure to neurological trauma cases will not only be proportionally higher, but higher in general because the more interesting and severe cases are brought to the hospital from surrounding care centres.
In a global health context, I hope to see how a large diverse population affects the statistical probability of encountering a particular illness.

2 I feel it will be beneficial to my understanding of health and medicine as general concepts to see the dichotomy between a relatively underserved area (and subsequent effects on population health) and the presence of a high-octane trauma centre with many cutting edge treatments and technologies. The United Kingdom has many such health areas; where poor/rich areas are served with disproportionately good/poor healthcare. I look forward to researching the prevalence of neurological disease in this area, and specifically neurological sequelae to trauma in this area, going off the base hypothesis that it will have poor outcomes due to the poverty of the area.

OBJECTIVES SET BY STUDENT

3 I am deeply interested in ITU and particularly so in the concept of the vegetative state and coma. Through this placement, I hope to observe many of these patients in all stages to hopefully understand this relatively common but generally poorly understood condition. To further my understanding, I shall be studying in depth the more common stages and carrying out personal research into the mechanics of this stage. I shall also be tailoring the patients I am seeing to not only understand the theoretical knowledge of this stage, but also the interventions associated with it.

4 I plan to treat this placement the same as the ones I shall be starting in August - that is to say, in on time every day as though I were contractually employed by the trust, etcetera. I hope to understand the challenges of working in an environment that isn't focussed on teaching, and I want to understand what it is like to truly seek out learning and motivate oneself to do the studying as opposed to being told to study. I would also like to see if there is an opportunity to be involved in any studies / audits as I would like to pursue a career in Intensive Care in the future.

ELECTIVE (SSC5c) REPORT (1200 words)

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

I undertook my elective in the Royal London Hospital on the subject of Neuro Intensive care, supervised by Dr V Varma. This elective also involved a lot of self study, as the subject was not one I am familiar with, despite the amount of time on Neurology and ITU placements - the practice requires far more depth of knowledge than I already had.

The bulk of my clinical time was spent shadowing on ward rounds and attending meetings as part of the ITU team. The patient we saw were highly technical cases and as such, this was more an opportunity to explore the specialty and observe how it works than get hands on doing much work myself. In addition, the majority of patients were very sick; they were already ventilated and mostly unconscious and so there was very little to be done in terms of communication skills with the patients (although I did manage to see a lot of communication skills with the family). I did however shadow some of the more junior members of the team and was allowed to perform simple procedures such as inserting cannulae and taking blood as well as filling out forms. I was also allowed to carry out the daily examinations on patients, although this was limited to the basic specialty exams - cardiology, respiratory and abdominal.

I was also given tutorials by certain members of staff; Dr Varma gave me many tutorials 'on the go' about the coma and the vegetative state, and I had an opportunity to shadow with a GP and some limited contact with an american anaesthetist - all in the context of the more serious neurology patient. I was also given some exposure to patients with long standing neurological conditions - for example, Parkinson's disease. This was to ensure that my clinical experience - while in depth in certain areas - could give me some input for my first few placements as an F1 where seeing complex neurological-ITU patients is fairly unlikely.

There were opportunities to see some more complex neurological signs; a particular interest of Dr Varma is the vegetative state and so I saw many patients in a vegetative state condition as well as carrying out my own learning into this poorly understood condition. The interesting distinction between a coma and a vegetative state is that while a coma can be likened to a state of general anaesthetic, the vegetative state patient can occasionally interact with the outside world in a way that can lead one to believe the patient is awake / waking up - for example, reflex movements to pain or remnant spinal reflexes - yawning, grinning, etcetera.

I feel this was a very worthwhile placement. I enjoyed the large amount of self-study time; it gave me the opportunity to really focus in depth on the areas I enjoyed and found interesting, while not having to look into areas I was not as interested by. While this may seem like a negative initially - the need to cover the entire *breadth* of a subject before delving into *depth* is important, for example - I feel that because this placement was directly an area of interest of mine and *not* something I chose for the impact on the immediate future of my clinical career, I could take the liberty to pick and choose the areas that truly interested me and I would be spurred on to read about in both my spare time, and the time allotted to me for self study. This was an attitude that was encouraged by the staff members I approached; they equally considered this more of an academic placement than a practical one per se, and so I had a thoroughly enjoyable experience learning only what I wanted to learn. I did make sure to do some reading around the other topics as well; this not only ensured that I had a somewhat rounded experience but also that I had more of a chance to fully understand what I was reading to begin with.