

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

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

Western Regional Hospital is the third largest hospital in Belize and provides both primary and secondary care. The hospital has 50 beds and 12 doctors work at the hospital. I was surprised when I initially saw the size of the hospital, especially because it covers a large area of approximately 66,000 people. There were only 2 wards at the hospitals, one for medical, surgical and paediatric patients, and the other for maternity. The A+E was also small with a few beds.

As in the UK, there are similar common presentations to general medicine in Belize, this includes diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cerebrovascular disease. These diseases are within the top 5 causes of death of people in Belize. Diabetes is the leading cause of death in Belize with 15% of the population having diabetes. The reasoning for the high prevalence of these disease in Belize is due to a poor lifestyle and a lack of public health campaigns. Whilst staying in Belize, I noticed the Belizien diet was high in fats and salts, as well as a lot of their foods being deep fried. In addition to this, a lot of the drinks that are consumed are very high in sugars. There was little in terms of public health campaigns to combat the high incidence of such presentations, including making the population aware of these diseases and how to prevent them through lifestyle changes, such as improving diet/exercise. This is in contrast to the UK, where there are a number of posters highlighting the importance of lifestyle to reduce the likelehood of developing diabetes, CVD and CVA. Doctors at Western Regional Hospital mentioned that not enough is being done by the government to inform people about the significance and prevalence of diabetes in Belize. In addition other important health challenges in Belize include co-infection of HIV with TB, as well as dengue fever and malaria.

Similar to NHS Trusts in the UK, Belize is divided into 4 'health regions' based on geographical area, and each area offers both primary and secondary care facilities. Tertiary care services in only provided by the Central Health Region. The private healthcare system is providing services to approximately 15% of the population. Although this is similar to the UK healthcare system, there are still vast differences in funding. 9% of the Belize's total budget is spent on healthcare, in contrast with 18% in the UK. At the Western Regional Hospital there was understaffing, with only 12 consultants, who were stretched to their limits. For example, there was only one A+E doctor working on calls and nights for the week, for a population of 66,000 people. There is also often one consultant per speciality, and if this consultant was unavailable to work, it can be difficult to organise cover. Furthermore there was only plain radiograph and ultrasound machine serving the hospital. If a patient needed a CT or MRI they would have to be transferred to a hospital in Belize City. Although the healthcare system is underfunded, the Western General Hospital seemed to operate smoothly and was able to deliver a good standard of healthcare to the residents of Belize. The health care professionals all have a positive attitude at work and therefore the health care system runs operates well despite being a very busy hospital.

Belize had the highest HIV prevalence in Central America, with an estimated adult prevalence of 2.1%. The current prevalence of those living with HIV in Belize is now 1.52%. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported action to reduce rates of HIV, contributing to this success in recent years. These actions have helped in tackling the challenge of insufficient public awareness initiatives on HIV/AIDS and against HIV stigma. In 2015 there was an increase in HIV testing done among those

aged 15 to 39 years. The increase of HIV testing in the number of females aged 15 to 39 years can be attributed to efforts in antenatal care. There is also a HIV counsellor at Western Regional Hospital to help patients speak about their HIV diagnosis and to address any concerns. The efforts made by the Ministry of Health have seen a reduction in the incidence of HIV and the number of new infections per year. Despite best efforts from external funding, HIV still remains an issue within Belize and is having a strain on the health care system economically, as well as the increased effort made by medical staff. The government should increase their own efforts in order to eliminate HIV, including improving education and increasing funding and human resources, rather than just depend on international funding and the global economy.

The UNDP has also agreed to implement grant to improve rates of TB and malaria. Belize has since seen a reduction in TB and malaria since increased government efforts.

The main languages spoken in Belize are English, Spanish and Creole, however the majority of the population have a high standard of English. Therefore I had the opportunity to practice my history taking and communication skills in those that spoke English as a first language. There were a few challenges where I had to communicate with patient whose first language was Spanish or Creole. I found this very difficult as I only knew a few basic phrases in Spanish that were not medically related. In these circumstances a member of medical staff helped me as a translator and therefore I gained experience in communicating with a patient using a translator. However it was difficult to get a member of staff to translate for you, since there are large patient lists and staff are usually very busy. It was a pleasure treating patients in Belize, they are a very welcoming group of people and have the highest of respect for doctors.