

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

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

Cape Town is a brilliant yet flawed city; it is vibrant and full of life with activities aplenty, there is beautiful food and wine with stunning views wherever you go; however these are overshadowed by the socioeconomic and racial inequality that still dominates South African society. I had a first hand insight into this whilst working in the largest public trauma centre in the area.

Groote Schuur Hospital in Observatory, Cape Town is the tertiary centre for trauma in the Western Cape. It treats an average of 30 patients a day, many of whom are critically injured from gunshot wounds, assaults or road traffic accidents. The level of trauma is incomparable with London, on my first shift in the department we handed over 7 patients with gunshot wounds and 5 assault victims with open wounds that required suturing. Compared to the UK it is a critically understaffed and under resourced department with two registrars and one intern (Foundation Year 1 doctor equivalent) on each shift, one of whom aptly pointed out: "I am the MDT" when asked where the other staff were. As a result patients wait for a long time to be seen. There are only two CT scanners in a hospital with 900 beds so scans are difficult to obtain, doctors are forced to rely on good old fashioned clinical judgement. Despite this the centre is said to have a patient survival rate on par with the UK and other developed countries. This is possibly due to their higher level of experience with trauma cases and the skills they have developed in prioritising patients that require immediate attention. This was evident on the ward round where the term "conservative management" for patients with gunshot wounds was commonly used.

One of my more bizarre patients was a gentleman who had been stabbed in his head. The knife was still lodged in his forehead but hadn't penetrated very far in. He had driven himself to hospital, apparently attracting quite a few puzzled looks when pausing at traffic lights!

For most shifts I was on my own in the 'green area', where less seriously injured patients present. I saw a large variety of patients, from fractures and wound infections to stabbings and head trauma. Prioritising patients was a key skill that I developed, for example during one shift a patient arrived when I already had a long line of patients, he had been stabbed in the arm and after doing a quick assessment I was worried about his weak radial pulse. I prioritised him ahead of other patients and escalated to the registrar.

The taxi journey from the airport conjured up conflicting emotions. I had been told of the rank inequality and racial divide that remains in South Africa yet it was still a shock that my first impression of Cape Town was to drive past the corrugated steel roofs of the local township that stretched as far as the eye could see. Cape Town has one of the highest murder rates in South Africa yet I didn't see any violence in Observatory, the area we stayed in. The vast majority occurs in the townships that flank the city. I became aware of the term 'community assault' during my time there. When a resident of the township commits a crime the community don't feel as though they can rely on the police to bring justice so take it upon themselves to do so. The result of these assaults was barbaric and difficult to stomach, they commonly used panga knives (a local machete) on their victims with horrific consequences.

I worked freedom day weekend, traditionally one of the busiest times of the year for the department. It stayed quiet until approximately 3am then a steady stream of patients started to arrive. I was quickly put to task suturing wounds, applying back slabs and monitoring patients when they went to CT. It was a fantastic experience to work at such a busy time and I really felt like I was a valuable part of the team.

Cape Town is a beautiful city, everywhere you look offers another memorable view, be it from the top of the mountain or from camps bay beach looking up at them. I climbed both table mountain and lion's head

