

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

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

Develop an understanding of what the WHO are working on in the prevention of NCDs

There are a large number of projects that the WHO are working on within the NCD department. One of my favourite initiatives is the 'Walk the Talk' campaign. This is an initiative aiming to promote healthy lifestyles in the workplace. This includes offering gym services at the WHO, daily runs/ walks whatever the weather, encouraging the use of stairs and offering flexible working hours so employers can exercise during the working day. I particularly like this initiative as it was great to see many people dedicated in maintaining their own good health. It also sets an example to others by following the recommendations developed by the World Health Organisation. Furthermore, I realised the significant difference between the WHO and hospitals across the UK. Healthcare professionals who are continuously offering health advice to patients are not encouraged (to the same extent) to keep themselves healthy in the workplace.

Alongside the Walk the Talk campaign, the department is also has projects working on physical activity, sugar-sweetened beverages tax, ending childhood obesity and marketing of unhealthy foods.

Develop an understanding of of the impact of NCDs worldwide

NCDs are responsible for 63% of all deaths worldwide and are largely preventable through lifestyle changes including reducing tobacco use, unhealthy diets, harmful consumption of alcohol and physical inactivity. However, it is important to recognise the role of government and industry in preventing NCDs. For example, looking specifically into the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children, evidence clearly shows that the commercial promotion of nutrient poor foods significantly contributes to childhood obesity and chronic disease. It could be argued that it is therefore the responsibility of the government to regulate this industry to reduce negative health outcomes. Although NCDs were previously considered to largely affect those in high income countries, 80% of deaths related to NCDs occur in low and middle income countries. Substantial research has focused on effective interventions which can reduce NCDs in high income countries, however research should also be carried out in low income countries also to have a significant impact on controlling NCDs.

During my internship, I have learnt a lot about the prevention of childhood obesity, the importance of physical activity, and the contribution of the food industry to the rise in NCDs. However, attending meetings at headquarters and the United Nations have made me realise the importance of working with people from different backgrounds. For example, whilst attending a meeting for the drafting of the Global Action Plan on Physical Activity, colleagues from Ageing, Traffic Accidents and Environmental health were participating. To have a significant impact on reducing NCDs it is essential that people from all disciplines work together.

Develop my professional and communication skills gained through medical school in a non-clinical setting

There are both similarities and differences when developing professional and communication skills in a clinical setting versus a non-clinical setting. During my internship, I had the opportunity to attend the World Health Assembly. It was interesting to attend plenary sessions and side events where I was meeting new people from different backgrounds every day. This is similar to clinical medicine, where patient turnover is high and you are working with many different healthcare professionals. On the other hand, there was a bigger difference working within clinical and non clinical teams. As a medical student you can find yourself being in the way in many cases, having to often ask for jobs to do and attend meetings which may not always be beneficial for your learning, (although that has reduced over the clinical years). My experience as an intern has been quite different. I have enjoyed the aspect of being given a project which is my own and being invited to attend meetings where I will be of value.

Take part in projects which will be useful to the department

My main project whilst interning at the World Health Organisation was to work on the guidance on diet and physical activity. I was specifically asked to focus on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children. After reading around the subject and several meetings with my supervisors, it was decided that I would create a report focusing on the following aims:

1. Update of the research on the extent, nature and effects of food promotion to children
2. Examine the impact of voluntary versus statutory regulations of marketing of unhealthy foods to children.
3. Critique the WHO framework for implementing the set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children.

I am currently half way through my internship and working on this project has been enjoyable and I have learnt a great deal. The purpose of doing this project is to make sure that there is an update of evidence of the impact of initiatives limiting advertising to children. This can then be used to help develop a framework for implementing the set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children. Ultimately, this framework will be used by member states of the WHO to aid in policy making at a national level.