

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

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

What are the most common medical conditions that effect the population of Rarotonga and the surrounding islands and how does this compare to the UK.

The top five most common medical conditions in the Cook Islands are; Hypertension, Diabetes Mellitus, Cancer, Coronary Heart Disease and Obesity. These diseases are all very prominent in the UK as well as in the majority of westernised societies. It is obvious as soon as you step off the plane that the level of obesity within the Cook Islands is very high and this obviously comes with its accompanying problems and diseases. From the statistics 90% of the local population is classified as overweight, which is a very worrying statistic. There are many causes of obesity in the Cook Islands. Firstly, and historically the Cook Islanders and many other South Pacific Islanders associate people of larger body habitus as wealthy and powerful as they can afford to eat. This lends itself to many of the population being happy with their weight. It is also socially accepted that people should be overweight. We met someone originally from the UK who had lived in Rarotonga for about 7 years, who was slightly overweight. He told us that when he went to see the Doctor he was told off for being too skinny. There are also many other reasons for the obesity problem, one of these is the decreasing amount of local produced being produced, which is resulting in more food being imported. These imported foods are carried to the Island on container ships which can take weeks to arrive so therefore the majority of the food is processed food that will have a long shelf life and therefore not be very healthy. This rise in obesity is not only present in the Cook Islands but is becoming a problem in the UK and throughout the world.

How is healthcare provided, organised and paid for in Rarotonga. How does this differ from the UK.

The Healthcare system in the Cook Islands is supplied from the government with a small donation from overseas aid. The main hospital is on Rarotonga where there are approximately 70 beds. There is also a much smaller hospital on the small island of Aitutaki. The cost of health care in the Cook Islands is split into three categories. If the patient is under 16 or over the age of 60 then health care is provided free of charge as long as they have residency in the Cook Islands. If you are aged between 17 and 59 and are a Cook Island resident then there is a charge for your access to health care. The cost of an outpatient appointment is between \$4 and \$24, an inpatient stay ranges from \$4 - \$8 per night. If you have to be admitted due to an alcohol related problem or accident then the prices are a lot higher and range from \$40 to \$1600. For patients who are from overseas or do not hold residency in the Cook Islands, they have to pay the full cost of their treatment. The hospital in Rarotonga can cater for a lot of different conditions and treatments, however if there is anything outside of the Hospitals limitations then the patients can be flown to Auckland for treatment. This system is very different than that of the UK as in the UK almost all treatment is free.

What public health initiatives are there in Rarotonga to combat chronic disease, e.g Diabetes. How do these compare to those in the UK.

In Rarotonga there are many health promotion advertisements lining the roadside. The majority of these highlight the diabetes problem and encourage good glycaemic control. In the supermarkets, the prices of the low fat foods and drinks are significantly lower than their full fat counterparts. For example, diet coke is priced at around \$3.90 in comparison to \$6.50 for the full fat coke.

The Cook Islands government also set up a strategy plan with the aim of bettering the health of the Cook Islands. Some of the key points were to identify early the infants and children who were overweight or obese and refer them to the family health program. Within the same strategy the aim was to decrease the obesity levels within the Cook Islands by 50% between 2012 and 2016 as well as to increase the levels of sport participation.

There has also been a big push in recent times to decrease the number of pregnancies, in particular teen pregnancies, and reduce the incidence of STIs. This is being done by educating the public on how to practice safe sex as well as making free condoms easily accessible. The health initiatives that the Cook Islands are putting in place are very similar to those in the UK, however they are often implemented years later.

To develop my effective communication skills with patients from a different culture

I found it very hard to communicate effectively with the patients to begin with when discussing their weight. In the UK the patient will often bring up the issue of their weight and know that they need to lose a few kilos. The problem that I found in the Cook Islands was that the patients were not as open about their weight or did not seem to think that there was a problem. I learnt that there were many ways around this. The most successful way that I found was to talk about the patients' day to day life and what they would like to do. Often the patient would bring up situations that they believe they would enjoy more if they were more active. From here I then found it easier to broach the subject of increasing their energy levels and activity levels and by hinting that one of the best ways of doing this would be to participate in more sport and maybe loses a few kilos.