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Elective Report

I carried out my elective placement in Regional Hospital in PERU IQUITOS. The location is on the east side of Peru in the Amazon jungle. When choosing this placement I was particularly interested to come and see the pediatrics department, in particular any tropical diseases that were extremely prevalent in this area.

I concentrated particularly on the Pediatrics department, whilst also visiting the other departments of the hospital from time to time. I was able to attend multiple ward rounds mediated by the consultant and the rest of the medical team. After each ward round, I was also given a tutorial by the doctors in a side room, in which I was able to ask any questions I had, and was given teaching associated with specific medical topics that we had encountered throughout the day. The ward in which I primarily operated consisted of 36 beds, which were always occupied.

Whilst on the placement I was able to observe, examine and monitor the management of various medical conditions associated with this region of the world, including Dengue fever and Malaria. I also noticed, how due to the extreme poverty in this area, many of the patients including children suffered from severe malnutrition. I was very much surprised by how large a gap was present in terms of the medical facilities present in this region of South America, and the those available at home in the United Kingdom. The equipment available in the trust was extensively basic, and thus the doctors were extremely limited in terms of the level of medical care they were able to provide for their patients. Due to this reason they were forced to refer many patients to the larger external hospitals in the city areas such as LIMA. Limitations in healthcare included a limited number of monitoring equipment such as saturations and heart monitors, to components for fluid management and nutritional supplements. In addition there was only basic first line medication available for infectious conditions such as Pneumonia (of which there was an outbreak in the Pediatrics department).

Due to the extreme lack of resources available to the hospital their ability to put into place a suitable infrastructure for infection control was limited. Alcoholic hand gel was not available throughout the ward. In addition it was evident that the hygiene level of the wards themselves was low, with no space available for isolating specific patients (e.g. Malaria). Resources such as gloves, and equipment for sterilization were very much limited, and in certain wards were non existent.

The doctors in the ward were very helpful. They adopted an attitude to healthcare which I admired thoroughly. As stated above they were motivated to teach us and make us aware of the health conditions prevalent in Peru, particularly Iquitos, and also give lectures after each ward round which included Q and A sessions. I was made aware by a particular intern, as to how a large proportion of the doctors did not actually receive a salary, they worked however, in exchange for basic accommodation and two meals a day. Even under such conditions it was surprising to see that each doctor remained passionate about medicine, and worked with great effort in order to help the patients.

It was evident that there were as an attempt being made to provide healthcare in the hospital whilst trying to adopt an MDT approach. Each ward round that was held included a consultant doctor, junior physicians and nurses. What I noticed was that it was very difficult for these members to work effectively as a team as the number of staff members was low and each member was over run with their workload. The number of patients demanding to be seen used to increase rapidly throughout the day, and this used to make it very difficult for the team to co-ordinate their healthcare provision.

In order to make the most of my experience in this placement I tried to be very proactive. I used to attempt to take a history from, and examine as many patients as possible. The obvious limitations that were placed on this were the language barrier; however with persistence I was able to gain much information. The nursing staff were also very enthusiastic about having medical students on the ward. Although they were very busy, they tried their best to help us communicate with the patients.

In evaluation, I believe that this elective placement was a very interesting and helpful experience. This is because it gave me a realistic insight into the healthcare provision in this region of the world, and helped me gain first hand knowledge on the healthcare provision and infrastructure, and health problems of the South American continent. This is because I was given the opportunity to work closely with the doctors, and other members of the MDT, and was able to take a very much hands on approach to the placement.