

Elective Report May 2011 by Afsheen Khaku

Reflective writing

The elective placement that I undertook was within the field of ophthalmology at the Advanced Eye Clinic in Sharjah the UAE. Sharjah is a smaller town close to the main city of Dubai containing about 15000 people. The clinic itself is a private clinic.

Dubai; a possible location for migration?

Dubai itself is an extremely hot city and thus air conditioning was essential. Whilst it was hot and sunny everyday the milder climate of the UK is actually more appealing. Immediately the attraction of tax free haven lost the gleam as the heat made it difficult to exist outside without air conditioning.

The language spoken most, as expected, was Arabic but virtually everyone that I encountered spoke some English; the younger the person the more fluent they were.

Healthcare in the UAE versus the healthcare in the UK

The placement itself being based within a private clinic and the Middle East presented different atmosphere to that within a London NHS hospital. The patients themselves were predominantly wealthy Arabs. They tended to provide rather expensive gifts for the consultant such as gold watches on top of paying heavy fees to the clinic!

The healthcare in the UAE is not all private and the system is described as a mixture with all UAE citizens possessing a 'health card' entitling them to receive free healthcare as a British citizen would under the NHS. However if you are non-UAE national (the majority) you are required to pay for your own healthcare. There are variances throughout the Emirates for example those from Abu Dhabi are provided healthcare through an insurance program which is paid for by both employer and employee.

In comparison in the UK we have a system (the NHS) which provides for all UK residents without distinguishing between National and non-Nationals.

I feel that in terms of Private vs Public the healthcare provision is similar in both countries. I can imagine that patients in the UK that attend private clinics have either paid (or had employers pay) for private insurance or are rather affluent in the same way the rich in the UAE are.

The premises, equipment and surgical/medical tools used were all of a similar standard to that of the UK. In fact the premises was above the standard of the average NHS hospital as would be expected in a privately funded clinic.

Patterns of disease within the population of Dubai.

The placement that I undertook was within a very specialised area of medicine and therefore did not allow insight into the most prevalent diseases within the UAE. Life expectancies in the UAE are similar to those we find here in the UK; Men 77 years and women 80 year. Interestingly the regional averages are 63 and 66 years (men and women). This suggests that healthcare is on par with that of the UK. Conversation with my consultant revealed that hospitals in Dubai itself are offering large

sums of money as sign on bonuses and huge salaries for Doctors from the UK and USA to come and work. Dubai appears to be sparing no expense for anything!

Interestingly whilst Dubai is becoming more and more westernised regarding its healthcare a Western pattern of disease is also emerging. Much of the population of the UAE suffer the same diseases and pathologies we see in abundance in the West. Risk factors for the highly prevalent Ischaemic heart disease are present throughout the population. One in four UAE nationals are diabetic, the same number smoking and the same number obese. Nearly 20% of all deaths in the UAE are as a result of Ischemic heart disease. On discussion with the consultant he commented that there has been a significant shift in the pattern of disease from communicable diseases such as malaria and TB to lifestyle disease and so the predominant health problems in the Arab population are Heart disease, hypertension, obesity and diabetes. The WHO has published statistics which suggest there is an alarmingly high prevalence of diabetes and obesity compared to the rest of the world. The UAE is suggested to have the 4th highest rate of obesity in the world with one third said to be overweight.