

**SSC 5C – ELECTIVE**

**KARAPITIYA TEACHING HOSPITAL, SRI LANKA**  
**ORTHOPAEDIC DEPARTMENT**

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I undertook my elective in the orthopaedic department of Karapitiya teaching hospital in the town of Galle in Sri Lanka. I changed my specialty from general surgery to orthopaedics as I was advised by the supervising consultant that I would be able to observe a huge variety of orthopaedic conditions, which may not be readily seen in the UK due to it being the busiest department in the hospital.

I chose this location, as Sri Lanka was my country of origin and in addition it was a country which has just come out of a 20 year civil war which makes it an ideal place to see a variety of orthopaedic conditions. The healthcare system in Sri Lanka is provided by the government which means that everyone is able to access it, however the resources needed to provide efficient healthcare to the people are not always readily available. For example, even basic tests which are readily available in the UK such as a CT scan are only available in specialist centres. This results in a long wait for procedures to be done and an overflow of patients in the hospital.

There is a private health sector which is available in Sri Lanka; however, access to it is very expensive therefore it is mostly used only by the affluent population of Sri Lanka. In addition, these hospitals also receive requests for imaging tests such as MRI scans from government run hospitals as they do not have the facilities to perform these tests in-house.

Despite the inadequacy in facilities in comparison with the UK, the patients are still provided with a very good standard of healthcare as the doctors are very knowledgeable and are extremely well trained and have also adapted very well to the inadequacy. In addition most of the doctors are also very experienced in different healthcare systems around the world as they are required to work outside of Sri Lanka as part of their training.

I spent my elective period in the hospital shadowing the junior doctors of the orthopaedic team and had the opportunity to participate in consultant led ward rounds and in outpatients' clinic. In addition I also had the opportunity to assist in various orthopaedic procedures. During my time there I was very fortunate to be able to see a range of orthopaedic conditions. Unlike in the UK, where each orthopaedic surgeon usually specialises in one joint of the skeletal system, the consultant in Sri Lanka was not dealing with patients whose presenting problems were just associated with one specific joint. For example, in just one consultant led ward round I had the opportunity to see conditions ranging from infections such as osteomyelitis, septic arthritis; fractures involving the distal radius, tibia, fibula, neck of femur, pathological fractures of the spine and fracture of the tibia as a result of a crocodile bite; and variety of orthopaedic tumours such as osteosarcoma, osteochondroma, enchondroma. The main reason for such variety and the absence of sub-specialties is the shortage of orthopaedic consultants as there are only 70 qualified orthopaedic consultants in the whole of Sri Lanka and only 40 of them work in government run hospitals.

The only drawback of this elective experience was the language barrier between me and the patients. Although I originate from Sri Lanka I was unable to communicate with the patients to obtain a history from the patient as a majority of the people in that area only speak Sinhalese and I am only able to speak in Tamil. However the patients were still very polite, friendly and co-operative towards us.

In terms of the patients' attitude towards the doctors and vice versa I did notice several similarities to the UK. The major difference is the respect the doctors receive from the patients. The patients in Sri Lanka are a lot more respectful to the doctors compared to the patients in the UK. This is mostly a cultural thing as they realise as a population, the



difficulty a doctor face throughout their training and the intensity of their training. In addition, they feel the respect is also an acknowledgement of their intelligence due to the common belief that you have to be intelligent to become a doctor.

However I found that the patients' expectations from the doctor are at the same level if not greater when compared to the UK as there is an expectation the doctor would have a cure for everything and this can sometimes become very overwhelming. In addition, one of the registrars I was following pointed out that there is a high level of scrutiny which accompanies the profession in Sri Lanka, and any mistake made by a doctor regardless of its seriousness will result in him being type casted as a "bad" doctor for the rest of his career.

In summary, I believe that I was fortunate to obtain a very valuable experience during my elective in Sri Lanka. It went a long way in providing me the opportunity to observe various different orthopaedic conditions. In addition, I was also very fortunate to be able to obtain this experience whilst working amongst the most polite and knowledgeable professionals I have ever met. On the whole I would recommend this placement to any future medical student who may be thinking of going there.