

Rheumatology elective report - Bart's & The London Trust

This five week elective module provided us students with a fantastic opportunity to explore areas of medicine that we have particular interest in, be it simply a matter of intellectual discovery or, as in my case, a work experience tool. Ever since my fourth year of study I have expressed a particular interest in rheumatology. I found the multi-system nature of the conditions both challenging and fascinating. I also, during my fourth year experience, found the Bart's and The London team, based at Mile End, extremely accommodating and eager to teach. I therefore put this team at the top of my list of possible elective ideas.

I was initially hoping to spend the module in the US, however the obscene tuition fees put me off and so I decided to utilise the time over here the UK. Regardless of where I went, I had already decided to pursue rheumatology as this is a field in which I would like to work in the near future. I approached Professor Bruce Kidd at Mile End Hospital and asked if he would be so kind as to accept me on a rheumatology elective placement, to which he happily obliged.

To ensure I could get the most out of the module as possible I formed a list of learning objectives. These were; to attend general and specialist rheumatology clinics, to attend the rheumatology ward rounds and also, if time permitting, start a project with the help of a member of the team which could in some way help with jobs later on if publishable. I had not been exposed to much hospital rheumatology from past experience so I took it upon myself to try and get a good exposure to this. I had already spent some time in hospital based clinics so although I decided to devote some time to them I spent most of my time on the ward.

Overall I very much enjoyed the module and I would certainly recommend that other students considering a future in rheumatology should at the very least consider spending it at the Bart's and The London Trust. I was in charge of what I wanted to during the weeks. I obtained a timetable from the secretaries and tried my best to turn up to most of the sessions at least once. The elective served very much as an add-on to the material experienced in year four. This time, as well as attending general clinics, I was exposed to more specialised clinics such as nurse led anti-TNF clinics for patients either starting new treatment or for those under review. This gave me a fantastic insight into the multidisciplinary management of complex systemic rheumatological conditions. I also found the hospital based ward rounds very interesting. Although there may be fewer patients on the ward rounds than other specialities, their conditions are extremely complicated and it was a great experience to see a mixture of young and old in the hospital. I was also allowed to interact with the families who provided me with an insight into the social implications of some of these diseases.

What I enjoyed most of all was the interaction with both the patient and their families. During my short experience in year four we did not get much of a chance to talk to the families about how their lives had been changed by the diagnosis of their friend or family member. The multidisciplinary team plays a huge role in organising a structured package of care, which I was able to appreciate from the outside. I enjoyed spending time with the nurses and physiotherapists. They described to me some of the jobs they have and showed me a selection of techniques and exercises they have developed designed to improve patient mobility. Before this module I really did not appreciate the impact these diseases can have on the patients family, home and social life as well as the their all-important work life. It is constantly amazed me as to how many of these patients just want to get back to work and restart earning money for themselves and their families. I also spent some time with patients who, among other conditions, suffered from increasing amounts of pain in their joints and muscles and I learned first hand how debilitating it can be.

As well as attending clinics and hospital wards round I chose, with the help of some of the team members I have made a start on a project. I decided to focus my project on those patients suffering with Ankylosing Spondylitis receiving anti-TNF treatment, investigating whether there is any difference in drug response with ethnicity and age. Although the project is still being developed and yet to be completed I am hopeful that interesting data will come to surface and I remain optimistic in regards to its publication. If the work does go well I will extend it further covering those patients with suffering with Rheumatoid Arthritis too.

It would be difficult for me to suggest possible improvements to the programme as I feel I have made the

most of what is a relatively short period of time. Given more time I would have liked to spend more time studying paediatric rheumatology as I also have a special interest in this topic. I could have either done this at the Bart's and The London Trust or organised a further elective period with the Great Ormond Street Hospital Rheumatology Unit.

In hindsight I am glad that I decided to spend my elective here in the UK. Although I may have not gained the cross-cultural experience of some of my colleagues who went to third world countries, I feel that this module has helped me explore my interest in a speciality I am seriously considering taking up in the future. I will utilise the skills I gained to help improve my CV when applying for rheumatology jobs in the future and I valued greatly the advice I received from the team members. This process provided an eye opening experience to the in-and-outs of hospital rheumatology and I would whole heartedly recommend this team for future electives for those students who have a special interest in rheumatology. Thank you very much to the Mile End team for their time and patience with me!

Asad Shabbir
Bart's & The London Medical School