

GENERAL
SURGERY

Elective Report

Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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For my elective I had spent an incredible five weeks in Malaysia. For my placement I was based at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia or translated from Malay as the National University of Malaysia Medical Centre/ Hospital (HUKM). Located in the South East of Kuala Lumpur in the district of Cheras, HUKM is one of the major tertiary referral centres in Malaysia and one of two based in the capital city Kuala Lumpur, the other being Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL). Since I am keen in surgery, I chose to be attached to the general surgical and vascular team. Over the course of five weeks I had learnt a great deal about medicine, surgery, their healthcare system, and about the medical profession and career development in Malaysia.

The hospitals in Malaysia are divided into the private and public sector and medical tourism has become now one of Malaysia's top priorities. Malaysia also has their own standard accreditation to guide hospital standards in Malaysia. Also, all medical centers opened in Malaysia must be licensed by the Malaysian Ministry of Health. UKM is a government based hospital which sees patients both from the public and private sectors. Malaysia is well on its way to develop itself as a medical tourism hub. The country has excellent hospitals, English is widely spoken, and many staff have been trained to a high level in the UK or in the US.

The Faculty of Medicine UKM was established in May 1972 and admitted its first batch of students in May 1973. UKM is an academic medical centre established through the merger of the Faculty of Medicine and its teaching hospital, Hospital UKM. The hospital lies adjacent to the university. They boast some of the latest technology and innovation in medical and surgical care. The hospital is very well organised and equipped. It has all the medical, surgical and specialties departments that you would expect to find in any western hospitals.

The hospital complex at UKM is enormous. The accident and emergency department occupies a building of its own with ample space for emergency vehicles at the rear of the hospital. The university medical school campus occupies a very large block opposite the A&E department. On entering the main hospital building, it is easy to see that the hospital is not very old and is extremely large, spacious and modern.

On my first day, upon arriving I was introduced to my surgical team. I wasted no time in getting into scrubs and straight into theatres. The first operation I saw that day was removal of varicose veins. I had seen this operation a few times previously in the UK, so this was not so interesting. But nonetheless it gave me the opportunity to meet everyone involved and my team. I really enjoyed it as they made me feel very welcome to their country and to their hospital, and more so as they made me feel as an important member of the team.

I had joined my team in the outpatient's clinic on number of occasions. The outpatients department was really busy there were a huge number of patients to be seen by the vascular

team that morning and there were not enough rooms for patients to be seen individually by doctors. Due to the lack of rooms two patients were seen by two doctors at the same time in one consulting room. This was an unorthodox way of getting a large number of patients seen as quickly as possible. The obvious down side of this was that patient confidentiality and autonomy was not preserved while on the other hand I did see that junior staff were more confident in their approach to patients as a result of having their senior nearby to help if needed. I must say confidentiality at UKM is not a high priority or taken that seriously as it is here in the UK.

Like the lack of confidentiality, hand washing which is paramount in UK hospital seemed to me non-existent in most parts of the hospital at UKM. Having been so accustomed to hand washing policies in NHS hospitals on our clinical placements it felt very strange that there was a lack of alcoholic hand wash, even in clinical areas such as the outpatient department. Even more shocking than this was the frequent lack of available soap near wash basins. Often I had to ask nurses and doctors to get hold of soap. When discussing hygiene with the doctors, everyone seemed to understand the importance of hand washing, particularly between seeing patients. However there seemed to be no policy or provision to encourage hygienic behaviour.

Besides the lack of confidentiality and hand washing, I could not find much shortcomings. In fact most of the times I was left very impressed by the hospital system and had a number of aspects which I thought were very positive and excellent. One positive aspect of the hospital was that wards had plenty of space with good ventilation, normal room temperature and odour free which is more than can be said for most UK wards. Another point of observation was that all the departments seem well staffed for the level of workload. There were on average 15 nurses per ward with each ward accommodating approximately 20-30 patients. Again this compares favourably to the UK where there seems to be too much workload per staff member. This was also the case with the medical staff. There seemed to be an adequate number of doctors on the team especially in outpatient clinics. In the operating theatre patients are not 'squeezed' on to the list and on average we saw about 2 operations each morning. Surgeons and theatre staff have adequate rest facilities with a daily supply of traditional Malaysian food which was lovely in between operations.

During my time at UKM I took the opportunity to speak to many of the doctors and surgeons there. In particular spoke about their training, career pathway and lifestyle. In general they were all very positive and said that hours were generally long but good and the job was not as taxing as in the UK as many having trained abroad and some in the UK. The impression I was left was that the surgical training in Malaysia is not as competitive as it is in the UK and therefore the pathway to becoming a surgeon is generally easier. You have to demonstrate you are highly motivated and enthusiastic about surgery, however no basic surgical skills are required.