

GENERAL
MEDICINE**Elective Objectives**

1. **Discuss the most prevalent presentations in Peru and how these differ to the UK**
2. **Describe the healthcare system in Peru focussing on the services provided and how they differ from the UK**
3. **Global health is an ever-changing branch of medicine. Describe how what you have seen in Peru and the services it offers supports this statement**
4. **How has working in Peru altered your perceptions of global medicine? Reflect on these changes illustrating your experiences**

Spending time in the paediatric and department in a regional hospital, illustrated many key differences in the presentations between children in Peru and those in the UK. Before the author illuminates these further, it is important to outline the demographics of the region in Peru in which the hospital resided.

Loreto is the largest region in Peru, which covers over a third of Peru's territory. The capital city of Loreto is Iquitos, which is the only capital city in the world that is inaccessible by road from the mainland. This is due to the fact that it is situated in the Peruvian rainforest and is hence only accessible via boat and aeroplane. As a city, there are 460,000 inhabitants in Iquitos^{[1],[2]}, but it is visited by approximately 250,000 tourists yearly^[3]. The majority of the income is from tourism and it is currently going through a period of social and economic development. As a result, Iquitos is a relatively deprived area, with a large difference between the social classes and this is best viewed around the city centre and in the hospital environment.

Many people are unable to afford the costs of healthcare due to the fact that the healthcare system is not a free one. This is depicted in the nature of the presentations best illustrated through one particular paediatric disease, namely Pertussis, widely known as whooping cough.

In the paediatric department, there were approximately thirty beds. Of these, around a third were taken up by children with pertussis. Despite vaccinations being given to children (all of the children with pertussis in this hospital had been given the vaccination), the nature and quality of the vaccination was so poor, that children often ended up catching pertussis anyway. This is of note, as when questioning one of the consultant paediatricians about this, the author was informed that due to the finances available, a better vaccination was not able to be administered, hence parents had to make do with the vaccination quality that could be achieved with the finances available.

It is interesting to note that this would not be the case in the UK, and in the UK, the government has virtually eradicated the incidence of pertussis. This is

something that the government in Loreto are working towards, however, due to the lack of finances available, they are unable to afford a better quality of vaccination; hence as a result there is still an increasing incidence of Pertussis.

Despite this, there are still some patients that are unable to afford the costs of the private healthcare system and these patients unfortunately are unable to receive healthcare. There are many that travel to this region as the healthcare in comparison to the rest of Loreto is relatively cheap, hence there were some patients that had travelled down the river by boat for approximately two weeks in order to receive their healthcare. This is something that is taken for granted in the UK, as generally, if healthcare is required, it will be delivered virtually at the point of contact and immediately for emergencies. There is enough support and the system in place is sturdy enough to be able to take the weight of much of the emergency situations that occur. This is not the case in Loreto and many of the emergency services collapse under intense burden, with not enough hospital staff and not enough resources in place.

However, there is much in the way of development and within the very same hospital, the services offered were about to increase drastically, due to an increase in government funding. This was due, in part, to the additional funds received from a recent award given to the region for being the flagship visiting point in the Amazon and so as a result the numbers visiting the area on tourism had virtually doubled over the last three years. Therefore, change is definitely in place and there is much occurring in the way of development in the area and so all of this should lead to better healthcare provisions and much more in the way of resources provided.

Having seen much of the hospital and having worked across many of the departments, it was safe to say that there is much needed in the way of development for this region, but as has been previously mentioned, change is imminent and is occurring. Development has already been seen within the ITU Paediatric department and there is one particular case that should be reflected on to illustrate this.

A five month old baby was brought in with bronchiolitis, twenty four hours previously which was very severe and as a result was placed on a mechanical ventilator in ITU. Unfortunately within six hours the baby had passed away and this occurred over night. On returning in the morning, the mother had been informed on the ward and allowed time with the baby. On discussion of why this had occurred, it became known to the hospital staff that the mechanical ventilator had been calibrated incorrectly and this was the fundamental reason as to why the baby had died. A form was filled out and this would then be submitted to the senior management team who would review this.

This case indicates that, despite the best efforts of the staff, human error was the reason for the mortality. This was quite common according to the consultant paediatrician and it really hit home the importance of have the right resources in place that functioned efficiently and correctly. Development is in place, as the machine was immediately replaced and now the consultants have to fill out

documentation as to why patients have died for an audit that is being conducted by the government.

In short, global health is an ever-changing branch of medicine, and there is much difference between the UK system and that in Peru. It is important to acknowledge reasons why this is the case and how development can occur and is currently occurring, in order to best meet the needs of the patient. It is encouraging to see such change in a very deprived area, and perhaps within a decade, this hospital will be very much like a UK based hospital with similar resources in place.

References

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- [2] <http://www.atractivosturisticosdelperu.com/2009/02/iquitos.html>. Accessed on 22/05/2013
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