

Elective report -Alice Lucey

Describe the pattern of disease in the population of Tobago:

Tobago is a small Caribbean island forming half of the country of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the smaller of the two islands situated at the south of the Caribbean islands quite close to Venezuela. The majority of the population of Tobago are Afro-Caribbean and so the most common illnesses here are the ones with the highest prevalence in this group.

Whilst in Tobago I chose to spend my elective doing paediatrics and I was able to see a wide range of different conditions during my time here such as asthma, staphylococcal scalded skin syndrome, cerebella ataxia and cleft palate to name a few. On speaking to the team and observing the wards and clinics it would appear that sickle cell disease has a very high prevalence amongst the paediatric population here. Most babies receive the heel prick test to look for sickle cell after birth as there is a higher incidence of the genetic mutation in this population. Whilst in clinics I saw several cases of sickle cell disease being followed up and on the wards there was a case of acute chest syndrome due to sickle cell and the patient had to be transferred to Trinidad hospital as there was none of her blood type in Scarborough general hospital for her exchange transfusion.

Describe the pattern of health provision in Tobago and compare this with the UK:

Scarborough General Hospital opened as a new hospital in December 2012. It is a very modern and clean hospital and has a lot of similar facilities to the UK. One of the differences I noticed in the hospital is that in the adult medicine the wards are not split into different specialities in Tobago as they would be at home but there is a general medical ward where patients with any medical problem go with a separate surgical ward for surgical patients. The medical team is set up in a very similar way to the medical teams in the UK with an intern, house officer, registrar and consultant forming the team. In paediatrics, however, we did not have any interns. There seems to be less of a well defined MDT in Tobago than in the UK. There is a large nursing team on the wards with similar roles to those in the UK. A team of social workers is also present in the hospital although there isn't a team specific to the paediatric ward, they have to share their time between the adults and childrens wards. Patients could be referred for physiotherapy appointments but I did not see any physiotherapists on the wards which we would commonly see in the UK. I also did not become aware of any occupational therapy team within the hospital although this could be due to the needs of the patients that were in the wards whilst I was there.

They have outpatient clinics here in Tobago, as we do in the UK, with all members of the medical team seeing patients and then presenting these patients to the consultant with their management plan for each case. These were run in a very similar manner to those at home. The main difference I noticed was that there were no computers in the clinic rooms so any referral letters that needed to be written were hand written at the time and given straight to the patient. This did mean appointments took much longer than at home with

several patients being seen for an hour where as in the UK they get a maximum of 20 minutes.

In addition to these services they also have a ward review system in place in Tobago which I have not seen in the wards at home. This is for patients who were recently discharged or seen in clinic who need a quicker follow up than they could get waiting for a clinic appointment as they can be seen in the next week with the ward review. They get a ten minute appointment with one of the doctors to follow up on how their treatment has been working or to explain test results. I think this is a very useful system to see patients quickly and efficiently without using up clinic appointments. It was run by the on call registrar and house officer and I thought this was an effective tool.

Understand the management of patients in a small, less well funded, hospital:

In terms of management of patients in Tobago compared to the UK I found very similar investigations and treatments were used for paediatric patients as to those at home. There were a few differences in the medications used for example different antibiotics were sometimes used however these change from hospital to hospital in the UK as well so this did not surprise me. The main difference I noticed was that for certain tests such as MRI or specialist tests patients had to go to the larger hospital in Trinidad where as being used to being in large hospitals in London I was not as used to patients having to go elsewhere for these tests apart from in cases of very rare or complicated diseases where paediatric patients might have to be seen at Great Ormond Street Hospital instead. However in smaller hospitals outside of London where there aren't the required specialists patients would also have to go elsewhere for management of their conditions although I found this might sometimes be for more basic requirements in Tobago than in the UK.

Once patients have received their investigations or diagnosis from Trinidad the majority of their follow-up is then back in Tobago to make it more convenient for them and they would only occasionally have to go to Trinidad. They were also able to get vouchers from the hospital for their travel to and from Trinidad to facilitate their trips and make them as little hassle as possible.

How have your clinical skills improved during your elective:

I have found my time in Tobago a very good opportunity to practice both my clinical and communication skills. I have been able to see quite a few different dermatological conditions whilst here which is one of my weaker areas so I found this very useful. There was also a baby with cerebellar ataxia who had some good cerebellar signs to elicit which I found very interesting. I was able to practice examinations of all systems on children of a variety of different ages and found this very good practice for my clinical skills. Overall I have found this elective placement very good and would strongly recommend it to other students.