

Elective Report

I undertook my elective at Scarborough General Hospital, Tobago. Tobago is a small Caribbean Island whose sister island, Trinidad, is just off the coast of Venezuela. My elective was in General Medicine and my supervisor was the Head of Department, Dr Okeke. Before I arrived at the hospital I had set objectives relating to Emergency Medicine which I have now altered as my placement changed to General Medicine.

My new objectives are as follows:

- 1) Describe the pattern of illness in General Medicine in Tobago and discuss this in the context of global health.
- 2) Describe the pattern of health provision and contrast this with the UK.
- 3) Describe the similarities and differences in the management of patients in General Medicine between Tobago and the UK.
- 4) Describe if working in General Medicine has influenced your desire to undertake a career in medicine.

- 1) Throughout my time in Tobago I have noticed that certain illnesses are more prevalent here than in the UK and the rest of the world. I have also noticed there is a pattern of illness that is somewhat similar to patterns we see in the Afro-Caribbean population within the UK. These illnesses include: hypertension, stroke, vascular problems such as deep venous thrombosis, and diabetes mellitus. I noticed whilst on the wards that many patients were receiving medications for hypertension and some of the patients were recorded as having blood pressure measurement that we would consider to be severe hypertension. I noticed that many of the patients on the ward had varying degrees of renal failure which may be accounted for by the high levels of diabetes and hypertension. In outpatients clinic I noticed that there was a heavy focus on tackling the obesity issues that many of the patients encounter. Some illnesses that I have been taught about during my time in Tobago which are less commonly seen in the UK are sickle cell anaemia and Human Immunodeficiency Virus. In outpatients clinic I also saw a young woman who had had a mitral valve replacement as she may have suffered from rheumatic fever as a child, this would now be considered highly unusual in the UK.
- 2) During my time on The Adult Medical Ward of Scarborough Hospital I learnt that healthcare provision in Tobago is relatively similar to the provision in the UK in that adults are admitted to the ward via A+E and are cared for in a general medical setting, the care they receive is free at this hospital. I learnt that alongside a comprehensive government service there is also a private health service in Tobago which patients may choose to use to compliment

their free medical services. I learnt that these private services can also occasionally be accessed by patients who are unable to pay for them themselves by going through an application system involving government hospital doctors and social workers. This contrasts to the UK, where, in general, if an individual is unable to pay for a private service they have to wait and use the service for free via the NHS.

I learnt that the method for paying for prescribed medications differs between Tobago and the UK. In the UK medications are provided free of charge to inpatients in the hospitals however prescriptions obtained through outpatient clinics or through consultation with General Practitioners must be paid for at a standardised rate. In Tobago any prescription dispensed from the hospital pharmacy is provided to the patient free of charge, however any medications which are not available at the hospital pharmacy must be purchased from a drugs store for a non-standardised rate.

- 3) I noticed that patients are managed slightly differently in Tobago in comparison to the UK is that in Scarborough General Hospital there is just one Adult Medical Ward and the patients there are seen by general medical doctors instead of being seen by different doctors in sub-specialities of medicine such as cardiovascular, respiratory or gastroenterologists. This means that the doctors here are required to have a much broader base of their knowledge. This is a fairly small hospital compared to the ones I have been placed in during my time in London so there were sometimes as few as four patients per consultant on the Adult Medical Ward. Another difference I noticed in the way patients are managed in Tobago was observed when the team were planning to discharge an elderly patient. Here I observed that nurses seem to have a larger role to play in the management of a patient and often are more willing and able to perform practical procedures such as inserting cannulas. I also noticed that nurses seem to have more knowledge of the medical aspects of a patient's care rather than purely having a nursing role and therefore they are given more autonomy than most staff nurses in the UK. In observing the management of this patient I noticed that in Tobago there seemed to be less of a feeling of a multi-disciplinary team with regards to ongoing care after discharge from the hospital. For example in the UK it would be normal for the patient's home to be assessed by an occupational therapist and a package of care would be set up via the hospital that was appropriate for that patient's individual needs, however here it seems that there is more of a focus on the patient's family to put measures in place to ensure a suitable package of care is provided.

A similarity I noticed in the management of patients between Tobago and the UK was that the investigations done were generally the same as in the UK however I noticed that different parameters were used to assess the severity of an illness. I also noticed that in Tobago the ordering of investigations is always done in paper format and this sometimes leads to there being a delay in getting the reports of the tests. I noticed that a similarity to the way patients are managed in the UK is that since this is a small hospital if patients become too ill here and the hospital does not have the facilities to cope with a certain aspect of the patient's illness then they will be sent to a bigger hospital which is better resourced, in this case to a hospital in Trinidad.

- 4) This elective has certainly encouraged me to undertake a career in medicine and has influenced me to want to travel more and see how medicine is delivered in countries other than the UK. I most liked that medicine in this hospital was not divided into subspecialties as that forced me to keep my mind open to all aspects of the patient's health.