

**Elective Report – ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA SEARCH AND RESCUE**

**Supervisor: Jonathan Cornelius (info@absar.org)**

**Elective Subject: Pre-hospital and Emergency Medicine**

**Elective Dates: 20/4/13 – 25/05/13**

**Introduction**

Antigua and Barbuda Search and Rescue (ABSAR) is a charitable organization dedicated to saving lives in Antigua and Barbuda and the surrounding waters. They provide emergency cover 24 hours a day, 365 days a year both on land and sea. They are based in a medic station in Falmouth Harbour, for ease of access to the local population and the sailing community that frequent the harbour areas in the south eastern corner of the island. The medic station receives donations from incoming and outgoing boats in terms of medicines and equipment, and does not charge for any of its services.

**1) Describe the differing attitudes to healthcare, especially in regards to emergency presentations. Compare and contrast this to the UK.**

Attitudes towards emergency healthcare in Antigua are similar in many ways to that in the UK. The local populations are concerned with their general health, but when in crisis they also know that there is a free service which can provide them with immediate assistance. ABSAR is a charitable organization that is manned on an entirely voluntary basis. One of the four directors, Jonathan Cornelius, carries the emergency phone and radio 24/7 in order to answer any emergency call, day or night. ABSAR also works in close co-operation with the Antiguan Coast Guard, Fire service and Emergency Medical Service.

ABSAR can respond to any emergency, and is equipped with a response vehicle that is able to transport patients to either the government run hospital or a private clinic, depending on the patient's needs. All of the volunteers are trained or training EMTs and have seamanship skills. It is a paramedic run service, much like the London Ambulance Service (LAS) for example, which is concerned mainly with pre-hospital care, although the medic station does provide a walk-in service too.

The presentations that I have encountered whilst working for ABSAR mainly have included the patients attending the medic station. This can vary from perforated ear drums, wounds, suturing cases, or even simple conjunctivitis. This varies from the UK in terms of how our emergency service operates, however, the acute presentations have included a CVA and a fall, so in that sense, it does not vary from the UK at all.

**2) How is healthcare organized and delivered in the Caribbean? How does it differ from the UK?**

Healthcare in the Caribbean can vary from island to island and my only exposure was to the system in operation in Antigua and Barbuda. This is partially government funded and partially private, which is different to how the UK system works at present. One of main differences being that the service provided by ABSAR allows the patient to choose which specialist they would like to see at the point of contact. The EMS service, by comparison will transport them directly to the government funded hospital for treatment, which is how the UK NHS system works.

**3) Learn and describe how private healthcare differs from the NHS?**

Private healthcare provides the means by which to ascertain the level of care that a patient may expect, in comparison to a government funded healthcare service. It is possible for a patient with private healthcare insurance to dictate how they are investigated and treated, along with the ability to have access to all the specialties, should they feel they need it.

This differs from the NHS, as some of the decision making process is dictated by internal and external policies, which will impact on what is deemed appropriate investigation or treatment for a particular ailment. The NHS' founding vision was to provide a healthcare service which was free at the point of contact, which is significantly different to the ethos of private care, where money and payment is the main concern. The NHS will always aim to provide the best level of care, with the patient at the center of its aims. This may not be the main motivation in the private sector, and can be entirely dependent on the treating physician and their particular attitudes.

**4) Further my knowledge and experience of emergency medicine and pre-hospital care. Reflect on how this will influence my future clinical practice.**

The time that I have spent with ABSAR over the last few weeks has been some of the most enjoyable and no doubt invaluable time in my training. I have had the opportunity to be a part of the team, spending time with and learning from some of the most experienced paramedics in the field of pre-hospital care and search and rescue. I think the level of enjoyment I have had during my time here, has helped me to think carefully about my future career and the sort of doctor I would like to become.

ABSAR is proof that with dedication and a vision it is possible to provide free care to those who need it. I feel hugely privileged to have been able to spend time with this charity, but in particular Jonathan, who is an inspiration to myself and other medical professionals. I would like to say a very big thank you for

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allowing me to see the work that ABSAR does and to be a part of it. I can only wish the charity every success for the future, and I hope to be back next year!