

Elective report

Elective supervisor: Professor M.R. Mohideen (General Medicine), Karapitiya Hospital, Galle.

Learning Objectives:

- 1. What are the prevalent conditions seen in the general medicine department and how do they differ from the UK?*
- 2. How is the healthcare system organised and delivered in Sri Lanka and how does this differ from the UK?*
- 3. What is the role of socio-economic factors on the health of the local population?*
- 4. By reflecting on your experiences during the elective, what have you learnt and what impression has it made on you?*

What are the prevalent conditions seen in the general medicine department and how do they differ from the UK?

I was delighted to carry out my elective placement at Karapitiya Hospital, Galle. I decided to choose this hospital in particular as it is home to the largest tertiary centre within the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Added with the reputation of Sri Lanka providing a rich mixture of scenic beauty and cultural heritage, I thought this was the best opportunity for me to gain an insight into many different conditions that might not otherwise be seen back in UK. As I was based in the general medicine ward, I came across a range of chronic conditions such as Diabetes, Pneumonias, Nephrotic Syndrome. The conditions that I was particularly intrigued to see were the tropical conditions such as Dengue and Tuberculosis. Although the Dengue epidemic had been low at the time, it was still very much exciting to see a patient suffering from this, something I might never have seen had I not been in Sri Lanka. Another patient that comes to mind on reflection is a lady who had been admitted due to a snake bite. This case in particular was highly interesting to see as it is virtually unheard of in UK, yet fairly common across Sri Lanka. This lady was presented on the ward round followed by an informative discussion led by the Professor as to how and why snake bites should be avoided. One of the main differences that I found in regards to the conditions seen in Sri Lanka was that they presented much later on than they would in UK. Perhaps this is because of the lack of follow up and investigations provide here. In UK it is common practice for the general practitioner to be heavily involved in the patients care, often from the very beginning. All the medical investigations, procedures, treatments are relayed back to the GP and it is their responsibility to follow these patients up in order to maintain their health status. This system does not apply here in Sri Lanka and so the patients are likely to present to the hospital when their symptoms and signs have worsened.

How is the healthcare system organised and delivered in Sri Lanka and how does this differ from the UK?

Sri Lanka is one of the few developing countries that provides universal healthcare. It is organized into private and government funded healthcare. The private sector offers the more superior care of quality with more funding available for the latest tools to aid in investigations and management of patients. The private healthcare facility also offers a shorter waiting list for those patients which simultaneously go in hand with better quality of health offered to those patients. Unfortunately, many of the Sri Lankan

Ssc5c Elective Report- Seher Samiy

citizens cannot afford the private healthcare and therefore have to rely on government funded hospitals. This then means that they have to wait longer to be seen by doctors. Other common issues that I observed whilst being placed in a government funded hospital was the lack of beds on offer for patients. The financial situation was also very stretched which meant that certain investigations were not carried out leading to a delay in the diagnosis of patients. Due to this issue of a lack of resources, the patients had to be prioritised by how much in need of care they were at the time of presentation. I observed that in some cases a conservative approach was used whereby, if patients were not as poorly, they were sent home and told to use measures such as alternative ayurvedic herbal medications. Overall, if compared to the UK, the standard of care may well have reached below satisfactory levels on several occasions. However due to a lack of resources, beds and finance, it is inevitable that the best standard of care is impossible to provide, yet the doctors and other healthcare professionals do their best to aim for the highest level of care.

What is the role of socio-economic factors on the health of the local population?

A major part of the socio-economic factor that had an impact on healthcare that I could observe was that of finance. It was evident that the minority of people that could afford private healthcare were at an advantage due to better quality of care. Those at a lower socio-economic standing had to rely on the standard government funded hospitals which meant a delay in diagnosis and investigation and therefore delay in treatment of these patients. The geographical location of these patients was also a factor in the different healthcare received. Those who lived in the cities could have access to private healthcare should they choose to opt for that sector. However, those patients who lived in the rural villages, away from the cities, were not able to reach such facilities and maybe not able to afford it either way. Race and ethnicity were not much of a factor in healthcare as far as I could observe whilst at Karapitiya hospital.

By reflecting on your experiences during the elective, what have you learnt and what impression has it made on you?

Overall I would like to say that this elective experience at Karapitiya hospital was a great experience. I was able to allow myself to experience the great Sri Lankan culture whilst broadening my medical knowledge and communication skills. All the doctors and staff were helpful in explaining certain things as I was not able to speak the local Sinhalese language. The patients were also incredible helpful and willing to aid in our learning as this is what they are accustomed to by the local Sri Lankan medical students. I would love to recommend this elective to other medical students as the friendly nature of Sri Lankan locals and staff made this elective incredible enjoyable and informative at the same time for me.