

My elective took place in St Peters hospital Surrey. I chose this SSC in order to widen my interest and knowledge in vascular surgery. Choosing the UK for my elective was done as I had to do less paper work. I also think that vascular problems are more prevalent in the UK than other parts of the world.

The weeks that I spent on my elective felt very long but it was very beneficial in terms of acquiring knowledge and experience. The time I spent on my elective allowed me to explore more about the field of surgery. Seeing the breadth of the speciality was quite an eye opener, as my previous exposure to this field has been quite limited.

My previous knowledge in the field of surgery was very weak and therefore I decided to choose an elective in the field of surgery that could help me to widen my knowledge base. At the same time I have a great interest in the field of surgery. So I felt it was necessary for me to use this chance to improve my understanding of the topic. Spending the last few weeks in St Peters hospital in Chertsey was very much similar to my personal experiences in other hospitals which I attended during my clinical years in East London. The only difference this time was that I was able to choose the specific fields of surgery that were of my interest.

The majority of the time during my elective I was able to observe surgeries or sitting in clinics, which gave me not only information on the technical skills involved in surgery, but also the medical and background knowledge involved. Specifically, I was able to observe and engage in AAA repairs, carotid endarterectomies, stenting, varicose vein surgery and angioplasties. In my previous hospital placements I was able to observe some of these surgeries, however, this time I was able to acquire more knowledge about the technical aspects of them, and learn more about them. For instance, EVAR repairs were now becoming more common compared to open repairs, and how endovascular surgery itself is quickly advancing and becoming more popular, due to decreased complications of surgery and shorter stays in the hospital. However, other aspects of surgery such as the use of different skills as well as the long term effects are still being researched. So a lot of attention has to be given to these aspects in order to draw a final conclusion on the efficiency of the surgery.

I was also involved in history taking and what sorts of questions to ask whilst under time pressure. Even though I have been previously trained in history taking, I had difficulty in asking specific questions for the surgeries. So this opportunity was a valuable experience where I learnt a great deal about asking surgery-specific questions. For instance, whilst taking history from a patient for elective surgery, I learnt to ask about the relevant risk factors. I noted that every patient had similar risk factors. Most of the risk factors were diabetes, cardiac disease or cigarette smoking.

The typical patient in the surgery was an overweight diabetic smoker with angina with very little background of exercise. So the luxury of western lifestyle was one of the leading causes of vascular problems. This is why it is such important to learn more about vascular surgery particularly as medical student. I came to realise how important the role of the doctor is not only in diagnosis and management, but also with primary and secondary prevention. Many of the patients that I saw simply had no idea at how to avoid many of the risk factors associated with vascular problems. Therefore, I thought it was crucial to educate these patients and give them a bit more of background about the risk factors of vascular problems and how to avoid them through simple means ie. 30 min walking, low cholesterol diet and so on.

I was also able to see how effective it was to give advice regarding lifestyle changes such as losing weight, engaging in regular exercise or stopping smoking. For instance, follow up patients who were suffering from intermittent claudication made significant improvements in their symptoms. This taught me a great deal about the importance of preventative medicine and how crucial it is for a better outcome for the patient.

All in all, I can say that my elective in vascular surgery was a great opportunity for me to widen my knowledge base in the field of surgery. Spending time in theatres and communicating with patients effectively allowed me to compare and contrast my experience during my elective with previous hospital placements that I had during my clinical years.