

1. What are the most common emergency presentations in The Gambia? How do they differ from the UK?

Emergency presentations in The Gambia tend to reflect the time of year and the season that it is. The most common presentations whilst I was working at the hospital were children who had fallen from mango trees and severe cases of pneumonia. Falling from mango trees is clearly classified as a fall from a height, which although occurs in the UK I would not say it is one of the most common presentations. Gastroenteritis was also a common presentation, which is also generally seen in the UK emergency department.

2. How is the A&E organised and healthcare delivered? How does it differ from the UK?

The emergency department at Farafenni hospital is the first point of contact for anyone who comes into the hospital. The patients must first pay at the cash desk and then wait to be seen by a nurse. It is common for the nurses to see the patients and diagnose them and prescribe them medications. If they think that the patient is seriously ill then they will call a doctor to the department to come and see them. A patient cannot be admitted to the hospital without first going to the emergency department. If I were to liken it to any point of care within the UK it is probably the most similar to a visit to the GP. I found it interesting that the nurses were able to prescribe for the patients and indeed diagnose them, especially as they have not had any formal medical training.

3. How does the spread of general medical admissions compare to similar wards in the UK? Are there any similarities?

The medical conditions that I saw whilst working at Farafenni hospital were surprisingly similar to those that I have seen in the UK; it is the time of presentation and the care that the patients receive that shows the biggest difference. I was shocked at the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes merely because malnourishment is very prevalent. However, a lot of the Gambian diet involves vast quantities of sugar, so diabetes is very common. The Gambian health system lacks the regular diabetic reviews that we take for granted in the UK, so people tend to present with neuropathies and ulcers and therefore have to have toes amputated. Other common presentations that I saw were congestive cardiac failure and strokes. Congestive cardiac failure is treated in a similar way to the UK whereas I found the stroke care pathway quite difficult to deal with. The limited facilities and supplies available in the hospital combined with the inability of the families to afford the medical care meant that those patients who had strokes were quite often left laying in their beds with no interventions. Furthermore, the lack of any rehabilitation programs mean that patients were often sent home far from their baseline and with no follow up. The families are given no education regarding how to best rehabilitate their loved ones.

4. To experience a different healthcare system in a developing country and to improve my raw medical skills without relying on technology that we are used to in the UK. A daily diary will help me reflect.

Having the opportunity to work at Farafenni hospital in The Gambia has, without a doubt, enabled me to experience a completely different healthcare system to the one which I am so used to within the UK. There were numerous occasions where I saw patients being turned away because they did not have the funds to pay for hospital treatment. Similarly, the family were always asked if they wanted any investigations doing. It was encouraging that most families agreed to the investigations being carried out rather than just decline them because of the cost. Having said that there were patients being turned away because they couldn't afford treatment, I also witnessed staff being treated or investigated for free or the doctors allowing some people to only pay half of

the cost of their investigation and then turn the next person away who could not pay. There did not appear to be the greatest amount of continuity between each patient and there was certainly no such thing as continuity of patient care: if a patient required a follow up appointment, they were generally told to attend their local health centre rather than the hospital. One of the most interesting aspects of the Gambian healthcare system was the way in which they dealt with blood stocks. If a patient requires a non-urgent blood transfusion, their family must provide the number of units of blood that they need. If the patient needs an emergency blood transfusion, then blood from the emergency stocks is used but the family must replace the number of units that have been used before the patient can leave the hospital. I found this an incredibly innovative way that they have managed to deal with the lack of any blood bank. The healthcare system in Gambia is clearly very different to ours because they lack the funds to buy any supplies and it was quite common that medications were prescribed according to if they were available in the pharmacy. Quite often, there seemed to be a 'drug of the day' where everyone was prescribed the same drug, yet the following day it would be different. I was also surprised at the level of antibiotic use within The Gambia. It became apparent that the majority of patients were frequently started on one or more antibiotics, when there didn't seem to be an indication for it. Upon discussing these issues with the doctors, they seemed interested in our antibiotic use policies and how much of a problem antibiotic resistance is, but they were not open to changing their management plans or indeed their future antibiotic use, making it quite difficult for us to make a difference in this area. There are no ECG machines and the only CT scanner is 3 hours away. The X ray machine is only to be used for chest x-rays and the ultrasound scanner for abdominal problems. The first time I was given an x-ray film and asked to review it was mildly daunting because I am so used to looking at radiographs on the computer and being able to change the lighting. However, I soon got used to the 'old-style' films and managed to impress myself with my interpretation skills!