

### San Ignacio community hospital, Belize

Describe the pattern of prevalent diseases and health outcomes in Belize and discuss in the context to global health

Belize is a small country situated in Central America, covering a mere area of 22 966km<sup>2</sup>. In correlation with its geographical size, 320 000 people reside there resulting in a low population density of 13.87 persons/km<sup>2</sup>. In 2012, the GDP per capita was \$4576, classing the nation as a middle income country. The level of urbanisation is low (45%) in comparison to the regional average (80%). Below is a table summarising key health indicators of Belize in comparison to the regional and global averages.

Selected indicators	Belize	Regional average	Global average	UK
Life expectancy at birth (years) Both sexes	75	76	70	81
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	18	15	48	5
Adult mortality rate (per 1000 population)	160	161	187	90
Male	86	89	124	56
Female				
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100 000 live births)	45	68	210	8
Prevalence of HIV (per 100 000 population)	943	315	511	
Incidence of malaria (per 100 000 population)	13	139	3752	
Prevalence of tb (per 100 000 population)	51	40	169	

Belize possesses health outcomes which are comparable to other countries regionally and are superior to global averages. However, in contrast to UK health indicators Belize lags far behind. This is expected due to large difference in healthcare funding in both countries. Belize's healthcare expenditure HIV prevalence is high in comparison to the regional and global average.

#### Nature of healthcare provision in Belize compared to the NHS

The healthcare system in Belize is part publically and privately financed. This is similar to aspects in the UK as a whole; however, in the case of the NHS it differs. Similarly, healthcare is provided free at the point of use in both systems. At San Ignacio community hospital I noticed that there was understaffing and lack of medical equipment. The centre had no MRI or CT scanner and had one X ray machine. The X ray department had very old equipment. This became apparent to me after I saw a radiologist preparing radiographs by the use of

a hairdryer! Many basic tests take a long time to process in comparison to the NHS. While observing this, I reflected upon how lucky we are to have a healthcare system like the NHS. We do not have any financial worries at a time of illness. We have modern technology and first class physicians on our doorstep. All medicines and investigations are freely available in most hospitals. The NHS also possesses a strong generalist primary healthcare system; this is an important sector of healthcare Belize lacks. There is a stronger emphasis on secondary care which is more expensive and catches disease at a later stage of presentation.

### Exploration of my personal experience of working within a different culture and low income setting

Having been trained in East London, a melting pot of cultural diversity, I have interacted with people from a range of cultures and backgrounds. This put me in good stead for working in another country. Belizeans come from a strong Caribbean background, a culture I was familiar with due to my experiences in London. The main language spoken was English and Creole. This benefitted me when communicating with patients. I noticed that patients were extremely respectful to doctors and didn't criticise them. This was a stark contrast to incidents I have seen in the UK. On the weekends I travelled and went sight-seeing. I visited the ATN caves in San Ignacio, a scared monument in Mayan culture. The experience was eye-opening and offered me a glimpse of the rich ancestry Belizean people possesses. A highlight for me was eating the local foods. It was refreshing eating organic food free from preservatives and additives. Fresh plantain, rice and black beans were a delicacy and eaten in nearly every meal.