

Elective Report

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Vietnam – Cho Ray hospital , Ho Chi Minh City 2014

for my medical elective as a 5th year medical student I chose to undertake my elective in Cho Ray Hospital in Vietnam for 6 weeks in the Trauma and Orthopaedic department. Cho Ray hospital is located in Ho Chi Minh city in the south of Vietnam. Whilst Ho Chi Minh is not the capital of Vietnam is boasts the largest population and is home to Cho Ray Hospital which is the largest of the teaching hospitals in Vietnam and one of the main hospitals in the city taking referrals from the other smaller hospitals.

On our first day we were attached to the team and given two supervisors to whom were responsible for us and could speak good English. Our normal day would consist of arriving at 7 AM for the daily MDT and handover. The MDT was in Vietnamese but they would have a power point presentation up of the overview of the case in English and pictures of what procedures were done and our supervisors sat next to us each day to translate what was going on. Following the MDT we would then head to the operating theatres with the team.

In Vietnam the Trauma and orthopaedics team deal with 90% motorbike trauma cases and the remaining 10% were industrial accidents and a few elective orthopaedic procedures. This is partly due to the overcrowding of motorbikes on the roads with no apparent laws that drivers have to follow and that the majority of patient care is paid for by the patient so most cannot afford any elective procedures. This is completely different from home where everyone is entitled to free NHS healthcare and where the majority of procedures are elective operations rather than trauma cases.

The conditions that the doctors work in was quite a shock. On the wards patients with the least amount of money could only afford a bed which was in the corridor and there was often two patients per bed. In the operating theatres there were two operations per theatre with one anaesthetist covering both operations using very old and limited ventilators. During each operation there appeared to be a one in one out mentality, there were no scrub nurses and no time out before each operation. Whilst the equipment the doctors had to use was much more basic and limited than in the UK, they were still incredibly skilled and possibly better than the doctors back home of the same level as the doctors in Vietnam can do many more procedures earlier on their careers and have more access to practise them. During the procedures we had the opportunity to assists in holding parts, cutting and to practice suturing.

The biggest limitation to the elective was by far the language barrier. Whilst the hospital's website says they teach in English the majority of the senior doctors could not speak any whilst the newly graduated doctors had a better understanding. Fortunately our supervisors spoke English well and were able to explain and translate for us. Unfortunately at times when it was too busy they didn't have time to sit down, explain and translate so we would end up observing and not really know what is going on. In addition we did not see any patients that could speak any English at all so there wasn't any opportunity to practise history taking or examinations.

Over long weekends we had the opportunity to go and travel around Vietnam which was a major

factor in why we chose to go to Vietnam. The country was an amazing place to go and travel and wasn't too touristy and everything was so cheap. We were able to get beer for 30 p a bottle and a whole meal for around £2. on our travels we were able to take in a lot of the culture and history, especially about the Vietnam war. Unfortunately we are not going to have time to go and visit the north of Vietnam so will have to return in the future but will hopefully see the ancient wonder of Angkor Wat on our way back through Cambodia to Bangkok to fly home.

Overall I found it a exciting elective, which I would recommend to anyone. We saw a whole different approach to medicine and making the best out of what you have and got to see an amazing country which I will have to come back to one day to see the rest of it. Whilst the language barrier was frustrating at times it didn't take anything our way from our experience and was often overcome able.