

## Elective Report (Part 1)

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**Subject:** General Medicine

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Describe the pattern of disease seen in the Malaysian population and how this differs from the UK  
I have done my elective placement in Hospital Kuala Lumpur in the federal capital of Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur (KL) is a large and densely packed city, with an estimated population of 1.6 million people.

Prior to arriving to Hospital Kuala Lumpur, I was expecting the pattern of disease in the Malaysian population to be significantly different to the manner in which disease presents in the United Kingdom. I anticipated this due to the differences in climate between KL and London and due to differences in standards of living.

This was true in terms of infectious disease as there were many patients lying in the main ward with illnesses such as dengue fever, malaria, typhoid and leptospirosis. Some infectious diseases such as Dengue fever were so prevalent in this city that a ward nearby had been converted from a second class ward to a ward specifically for Dengue.

However, I was surprised to note that there were also a large number of people with illnesses very similar to those seen in London Hospitals. There included illnesses such as asthma, hypertension, congestive heart failure, diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The cause of these was attributed to the fact that these illnesses are found in metropolitan cities worldwide.

It was interesting as many patients at this had clinical signs that I had not yet examined in London and I found that this was a good opportunity to get familiar with these pathologies.

Describe the pattern of health provision in Malaysia and compare and contrast this with the UK.  
The first thing that I noticed when walking into the General Medicine ward was that the ward was simply one very large room with approximately 50 beds arranged in rows. There were no bays and the room was not arranged as a Nightingale ward. There were two side rooms to every 50 beds and there was no air conditioning. Although there were fans on the ceilings, I found it difficult to cope with the heat during the first week and was surprised that the patients were tolerating it well.

In the hospital, there were 12 wards specifically designed for general medical admissions. Health care for the patients was provided free of charge but the patients had to give an initial payment of 1 Ringgit (equivalent to 18p). I found that this was very similar to the National Health Service in the UK. However, the hospital also had special First Class wards for people who could afford

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approximately 500 Ringgits a day. These wards were air conditioned and very elaborately decorated. Patients ranged from 1 to 4 per room and each room had a glass case filled with trinkets. Although these cases were cleaned regularly, the vast amount of decorations in these wards did make me question if there was an increased risk of infection here.

I was surprised at the working hours that exist in this hospital. Many of the junior doctors work 9 hour shifts and then get a break and then have to come back in to hospital and do a further 3-4 hours before going home for the night. This differs from the UK where hours are more strictly regulated.

**What are the main infectious diseases in Malaysia and discuss preventative measures**

In Malaysia, the types of infectious diseases prevalent in the wards were different to those I had observed in the UK. Infectious diseases are prevalent in dense areas such as KL, where people are in close proximity to each other. In particular, malaria and dengue fever are prevalent in areas where there was stagnant water. As it rains heavily and frequently in Malaysia, there is a lot of water which stagnates over time. I have been told that in order to combat this problem, earlier this year, an initiative was set in place by the Malaysian Health Ministry to try and educate individuals to drain water that may be near their houses. Other prevalent infectious diseases included typhoid, hepatitis and leptospirosis.

I also noticed that every restaurant in Malaysia had a sink near the entrance within eyesight for customers to wash their hands. I thought was a very simple yet useful preventative measure.

**Self-development and reflection on my experiences.**

When I initially started, I found the hospital to be very busy and found it hard to find willing patients to examine as there were so many Malay medical students on the wards already. I was also unable to communicate well with patients who were unable to speak English and I was unsure of how to ask for consent to examine them for my own educational needs only. However, as I became more familiar with the culture and city of Kuala Lumpur, I found that my attempt at communication on the wards became easier and the flow of my examinations greatly improved.

Overall, I thoroughly loved my elective placement and the city of Kuala Lumpur and look forward to visiting both the city and the hospital again in the future.

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## Reflection

Was it **what** you expected?

I did not expect the hospital to be as busy as it was and have as much character as it did. Clinic waiting rooms were packed full of people to the point that many patients would be waiting in the corridor. However, the staff dealt with the number of patients in a well organised manner to get them all seen as quickly as possible.

Clinical **experience**?

We had a lot of opportunities to join ward rounds, shadow doctors, perform examinations and do simple procedures such as venepuncture when they needed to be done. Whilst we were not allowed to contribute toward management plans, we were able to discuss them with the doctors if they were available.

What **did** you learn about the **people** and the country

The people of Malaysia are incredibly friendly and polite and I thoroughly enjoyed interacting with them. The country was beautiful and the weather was very warm. The culture was different to anything I had ever seen before and I found it fascinating to visit villages and towns nearby and see how different the lifestyle was. The most noticeable that I found was that despite many people being very poor, they were always in good spirits and always ready to help us if we were lost or needed help with anything.

What **did** you learn about the health care professionals you worked with

As many of the doctors were working longer hours than I have ever worked, I was able to appreciate the extent of their patience and their love of the profession. They expected them to be tired but never complained and simply appreciated that they had such a job.

What **did** you learn about the health care system in that country?

I thought that their healthcare system was really well set up and even the poorest person could get healthcare for a single Ringgit.

What were the best bits?

I enjoyed meeting different people (doctors, students and patients) and talking to them. It was interesting to talk to so many different people and get another perspective of worldly issues from people across the world from me. I also enjoyed exploring the city with other Barts students and seeing so many students around the city all the time.

What were **bits** you least enjoyed?

I least enjoyed the initial part of trying to get to grips with the language barrier and communicate with the non-English speaking patients and doctors on the ward.

Were **there** any shortcomings?

There were sometimes too many students in one ward and not enough doctors to help us all. However, this was never really an issue as a doctor would soon become available to help us.

Would you recommend it to **any** other student?

I would highly recommend this placement to other students. It is both enjoyable and a valuable learning opportunity.

Were there any deviations from the risk assessment?

There were no deviations from the risk assessment.

How was your accommodation?

We stayed in a hotel which was a short drive from the hospital. The location of our hotel was in the centre of the city and thus we were near to all the tourist attractions such as the KL Tower and the Petronas Towers.

How were your travel arrangements?

We would get a metered taxi from our hotel or use the Metro system. We found that transportation was easy to get used to and never had any difficulty with travelling.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed this placement and would highly recommend it to future students.