

## SSC 5c: Elective Report

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**Elective subject:** General Medicine

**Elective location:** San Ignacio Hospital, Belize

### Introduction

Belize, previously known as British Honduras, is located on the north-eastern coast of Central America. With a population of only 334,297, Belize has the lowest population density in Central America. San Ignacio is located approximately 69 miles west of Belize City and 22 miles west of the country's capital, Belmopan.

San Ignacio's healthcare services are provided by San Ignacio Hospital and the Loma Luz Adventist Hospital in Santa Elena. There are also various clinics, doctors and pharmacies around the town. The San Ignacio Hospital is part of the Western Regional Health Service, serving a population of 22,114 and catchment of 22 communities. The hospital primarily provides services in General Medicine and Obstetrics. In addition, specialist clinics are run on a weekly basis provided by paediatricians, general surgeons and gynaecologists from the Western Regional Hospital.



### What are the significant health issues in Belize and how do they compare to the UK?

Given that Belize is a developing country, the majority of the significant health conditions are directly related to the country's infrastructure, standard of sanitation and reflect the population's general lack of education and awareness about how such conditions are acquired and transmitted. These conditions include malaria, dengue fever, gastroenteritis, cholera and HIV/AIDS. Even though the treatment for malaria has significantly improved in recent years, there are still concerns about future outbreaks of Malaria and other infective conditions in particular HIV/AIDS. An outbreak may impact the population size as well as the human resources.

Another area of national concern is the high mortality rate from non-communicable disease, in particular cardiovascular disease. Similar to the UK, cardiovascular disease appears to be a significant cause of death in Belize. Not only in the elderly but also in the productive age population of 20-49. In the UK, cardiovascular disease is the cause of more than a quarter of all deaths. Both countries share the common risk factors: hypertension, smoking, diet, obesity and diabetes.

In 2008, a UNICEF study found that only 10% of Belizean women were found to be exclusively breastfeeding from zero to six months. The Ministry of Health (MoH) collaborated with UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organisation/World Health Organisation (PAHO/WHO) and the National

Committee for Families and Children (NCFC) in order to launch a global initiative, the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), where all health facilities are responsible for encouraging mothers to breastfeed. In addition, it also aims to improve the care of pregnant women, mothers and newborns at all health facilities.

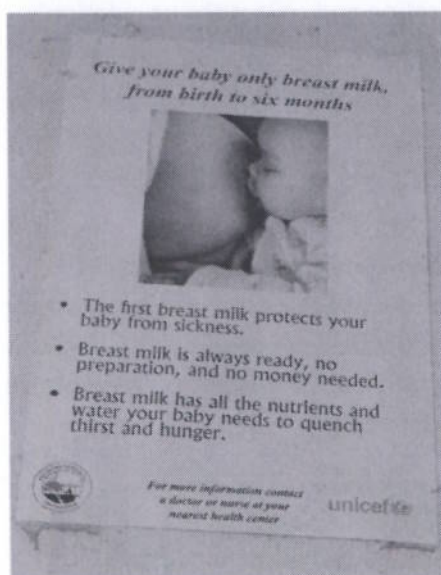
How are the medical services organised and delivered? How does this compare to the UK?

Similar to the UK, healthcare in Belize is provided through both public and private healthcare systems. The government agency responsible for overseeing the entire health sector in Belize is the Ministry of Health (MoH). The MoH is also the largest provider of public health services, offering affordable care with a particular focus on providing quality healthcare through a range of public programs and institutions. In comparison to the public sector, the private health sector provides care to a smaller proportion of the population – again similar to the UK. However, there is a striking difference between the private health services in the UK and Belize with regards to cost. In Belize, private health services are offered at a relatively low cost but still endeavour to provide a high quality of care.

What public health strategies are there in Belize for the prevention and/or treatment of the significant health issues outlined in objective 1?

97.2% of the population now have access to safe drinking water in Belize, leading to a significant reduction in cases of gastroenteritis and cholera.

HIV and AIDS, however, continues to be a major public health problem. Despite the MoH's efforts to promote education, distribute anti-retroviral drugs and provide care for affected patients, there are several issues of stigmata and discrimination which continue to militate against access to care and treatment. In addition, statistical analysis of the data may be deceptive as many cases are likely to be under-reported since clinicians may not indicate AIDS on the death certificate in order to protect individuals and their family. In 2000, the Prevention of the Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) program was implemented within all public health facilities and four private health facilities. However, the general population is demonstrating an upward trend in new cases of HIV due to an increase in testing.



The majority of the posters in San Ignacio hospital were similar to the one shown here (see left). Since the majority of the in-patients are expectant mothers, the hospital has really responded to the BFHI. According to a UNICEF report, early initiation of breastfeeding increased by 51% between 2006 and 2010.

Reflect on the skills that are required to be an effective team member in a new and unfamiliar environment. What learning points could be implemented into my practice when commencing an FY1 position?

There are many key skills that are required to be an effective team member:

- Communication skills

*It's important to be able to express your ideas clearly, directly and honestly in a respectful manner*

- Active listener

*This is required in order to follow instructions as directed and in order to absorb information from both colleagues and patients*

- Willingness to actively participate

*Being prepared and getting involved in teamwork allows us to build better relationships with our colleagues and also encourages learning*

- Using your strengths

*As well as using your strengths to their full advantage, it's vital to self-reflect and identify areas where there is room for improvement in order to holistically improve all aspects of your skills*