

Elective report

MBBS Yr 5

1. Describe the prevalent vascular conditions in Vancouver. How do they differ in the UK?

By far the most common vascular condition I had seen in St Paul's Hospital is ischaemic limb. Ischaemia are most commonly due to atherosclerosis. Only one patient I had encountered developed limb ischaemia due to a thrombophilic disorder. The diagnosis given by haematology service at the time was polycythemia rubra vera.

Most patients with limb ischaemia undergo by-pass procedures with venous grafts harvested from their arms or legs. Recurrence of ischaemia also seems common as many patients present with it after previous bypass surgeries.

The mortality outcomes of bypass surgeries are not spectacular. This may be because vascular surgery patients tend to be the sickest patients in the hospital (Dr Shaun MacDonald, personal communications 2014). I personally witnessed a patient who underwent mesenteric bypass, but arrested on post-op day 1. Resuscitative measures including abdominal aortic clamping were unsuccessful.

Common venous diseases dealt with by the service include varicose veins. Treatment options include surgery, radiofrequency ablation or a combination of the two. Other procedures I have witnessed or participated in include amputations, artero-venous fistula creations and temporal artery biopsy.

I was unable to determine the precise volume of cases in either Vancouver or the UK. Literature search in this area proved unfruitful. Hence, I am unable to fulfill this objective fully. However, given the similar demographics and socioeconomic transition stage of the two countries, it is possible that the proportions are similar.

2. How are vascular surgery services organised and delivered? How does it differ from the UK?

The vascular surgery service at St Paul's is a clinical division within the Department of Surgery. The service has three staff members (consultants), one clinical fellow, and one to two residents whose rotations are of shorter durations of one to two months. The service accepts referrals from family physicians, the emergency department, and clinical transfers from smaller regional hospitals. Hence, the organisation of the service is similar to that in the UK.

3. Develop surgical skills where possible and improve surgical knowledge

I had opportunities to do some basic suturing. I practised interrupted sutures and learned to do

continuous and sub-cutaneous sutures. I also witnessed vessel suturing but did not attempt to do it given that it is a higher level surgical skill which requires greater manual precision, structured training as well as special optical aids. I did not have the chance to do skin incisions and superficial dissections.

My surgical knowledge was improved through this rotation, particularly detection and management post-operative complications. This include pain, delirium and infections. Also, I can now undertake peripheral arterial and venous assessments reasonable independently through history, examination and the use of bedside tools such as doppler probes.

4. Explore any institutional work cultures and their effects on staff members

The work culture at St Paul's appears to be largely positive. Doctors work longer hours but this is taken in stride. In my time there, I have not heard any one complain about the work load or hours. It does not mean that they are perfectly happy with them but may simply reflects that the coping mechanism is not to complain about them. Otherwise, the staff there are similar to their UK counterparts in their dedication to their patients and their work.

The environment on the ward is also generally genial. The staffing ratio is similar to a surgical ward in the UK. Nursing staff are helpful and amiable (although I was told that this is not the case everywhere). Hence, it is quite pleasant to work in that environment. In the time I spent there, I had only seen one occasion where a nurse was visibly stressed. I find this remarkable as during my rotations in the UK, it is uncommon to find a nurse who is not visibly stressed.