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Elective Report. Paediatric Surgery Department, Red Cross Hospital, Cape Town, South Africa.

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Cape Town is one of South Africa's main cities, and sits near the southern tip of the African continent. It is home to a population of almost 4 million and is the capital of the western province. The Red Cross Hospital is a children's hospital in Cape Town. It was built in 1953 with funds from both Government and charitable donations. It is situated in the Rondebosch area of the city and is allied to The University of Cape Town Medical School and therefore is an important teaching hospital.

In talking to doctors at Red Cross I have learnt that South Africa has by far more doctors than any other African nation. However, most surgeons and physicians in South Africa work in the private sector, and few work full time in the public sector. Many do mainly private work and then part time clinics or operating lists in a public sector hospital. Interestingly you can become a general practitioner in South Africa straight after leaving medical school, there is no formal GP training required, unlike other specialities. This can sometimes mean that care in the community is sub-standard. The pathology seen here differs to the UK in a number of ways. There is a higher rate of trauma injuries seen in this country including burns, gunshot wounds and road traffic accidents. In addition twenty week anomaly scans are not done routinely, unless patients pay privately, meaning more children are born with birth defects than in European countries. However the prevalence in South Africa is markedly lower than in other African countries and many of the Arab states.

The scale of the geography of South Africa is vastly greater than that of the UK, specialist centres are fewer, and the distances travelled by patients far greater. Often patient files on clinics at The Red Cross would have a 'COUNTRY' sticker on indicating that the patient was not local to Cape Town. The Red Cross is South Africa's only child only health institution and receives referrals from all 9 provinces and all over Africa. It is also a centre for excellence for training in the many specialities that work in the hospital.

The working surgical day typically starts at 7.00am and interns (equivalent of foundation doctors in the UK) begin the ward round. The Consultant joins at 7.30 and conducts a business round of all the patients on the ward including any pre op patients waiting for surgery that day. The ward round is then followed by clinics or elective surgical lists and there is always an emergency list running - although sometimes emergency cases are added to elective lists. On Tuesdays there is a surgical meeting after the ward round which includes a lecture by a guest or local speaker. One week there was a very interesting lecture on the presentation and management of Hydatid Cysts, and the burden they present to the South African paediatric population.

My time at The Red Cross Hospital was mainly spent in the general surgery department. I attended ward rounds, clinics, elective and emergency operating lists and also medical student tutorials.

The ward rounds allowed me to learn about the pre and post op care of surgical patients, and also management of acute admissions. Examples of acute cases I saw include appendicitis, gun shot wounds, and incarcerated hernias. Although I did not do a huge amount on the ward in terms of practical jobs it was useful to attend rounds. Many of the patients had underlying nutritional deficiencies, although obesity was also seen. I saw very few caucasian patients during my time in the department.

I attended several outpatient clinics during my placement. These included general surgery, stoma clinic, plastics, ophthalmology, orthopaedics, and cleft clinics. It was very interesting to see a wide range of pathology. For example I saw patients with tongue tie, junctional naevi, pathological

fractures due to osteogenesis imperfecta, polydactyl deformity, Hirschsprung's disease, anorectal malformation with urethral fistula, cleft palate, phimosis, severe skin contracture scarring and deformity due to burns injuries, and chronic constipation to name but a few. There was a very present multidisciplinary approach to treatment as would be expected in a tertiary centre. Alongside doctors and nurses I met stoma nurses, occupational therapists, and speech and language therapists on clinics.

I also attended several surgical lists and was able to observe and assist in several surgeries. Examples of operations I observed or assisted with include orchidoplexy - first and second stage, umbilical hernia repair, nissen fundoplication, Hartmann's procedure for Hirschsprung's disease, hydrocelectomy, washout of empyema post gunshot wound, inguinal hernia repair, tracheostomy, and ORIF of pan facial fractures. I particularly enjoyed watching the laparoscopic surgeries as the technical skill involved was very impressive.

This experience in the operating theatre was probably the highlight of my placement and I enjoyed it immensely. Being able to see the operations up close (even if not assisting I could watch on the large tv screens in the operating theatres) made sure my understanding of many procedures which previously had been words in a textbook or answers to a multiple choice questions improved. In addition, my anatomy knowledge is now immeasurably better. Being able to assist meant that I was able to learn more about surgical techniques and also the many instruments used. This was helped by the student tutorials I attended for example the surgical techniques tutorial on Monday afternoons where I improved my instrument ties and learnt how to do hand ties.

My main objectives that I set out for this elective placement were to learn more about general paediatric surgical pathology in South Africa, learn more about surgical techniques and improve my anatomy knowledge. Through my day to day activities in the hospital during my placement at The Red Cross I am satisfied that I have more than adequately achieved these.

In addition to my hospital placement I also made sure I took time to explore Cape Town and the surrounding area. It is a beautiful city with its incredible background of Table Mountain and fantastic beaches. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in this amazing city and Hospital, and hope to return one day.