

ELECTIVE (SSC5a) REPORT (1200 words)

A report that addresses the above four objectives should be written below. Your Elective supervisor will assess this.

Elective Placement Report: Two Weeks at Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital, Belize City

My two-week elective placement at the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital (KMH) in Belize City provided invaluable insights into the complexities of healthcare delivery in a tropical setting, as well as the cultural and socioeconomic factors impacting public health. This report aims to address the objectives outlined for the placement, covering topics ranging from the management of tropical diseases to surgical procedures, lifestyle habits, examination skills, and my placement in obstetrics and gynaecology.

1) General Surgery and Referral Process: Observing basic general surgery procedures, such as appendectomies, at Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital provided me with insights into the differences and similarities between surgical practices in Belize and the UK. While the fundamentals of surgical techniques remain consistent, resource limitations and infrastructure challenges impact the delivery of surgical care in Belize. Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital is in a highly-populated urban area. I am sure that, if I were to have undertaken my elective in a more rural area of Belize, I would witness a very large difference in resources and infrastructure with regards to surgical practices.

The referral process in Belize differs from that in the UK, primarily due to variations in healthcare infrastructure and access. In Belize, patients may be referred to tertiary care facilities like Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital from primary and secondary healthcare centres located in remote or underserved areas. However, delays in referrals and limited access to specialized care remain significant issues, particularly for patients residing in rural communities.

2) Impact of Lifestyle Habits and Culture on Health: The cultural and lifestyle habits prevalent in Belize have profound implications for the health of the local population. Drug trafficking, in particular, has contributed to a rise in substance abuse and addiction among residents, posing significant challenges for healthcare providers. Substance abuse-related health issues, including mental health disorders and infectious diseases, strain the healthcare system and require comprehensive interventions addressing both prevention and treatment.

Additionally, cultural factors influence health-seeking behaviours and perceptions of illness among Belizeans. Traditional beliefs and practices may impact treatment adherence and healthcare utilization, highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in healthcare delivery.

3) Examination Skills Improvement: During my placement, I focused on improving my examination skills, particularly in auscultation using a stethoscope. In A+E, I had the opportunity to practice listening to murmurs and breath sounds under the guidance of experienced clinicians. Feedback from mentors helped me refine my technique and develop a better understanding of cardiac and respiratory pathology.

In addition to this, I also had the opportunity to carry out several examinations of the pregnant abdomen during high risk antenatal clinic. This allowed me to hone my skills in palpating the fetal position, assessing whether the head is engaged, measuring the symphysis-fundal height and

locating fetal heart rate using doppler. Feedback from experienced staff was extremely helpful in honing my skills, and I am sure that I will take these skills forward into my future clinical practice.

4) Obstetrics and Gynaecology: Comparing maternity care in Belize with that in the UK revealed both similarities and differences in approaches to obstetrics and gynaecology. While the fundamentals of antenatal care and delivery remain consistent, variations in healthcare infrastructure and cultural practices influenced the delivery of maternity services. Certain services were limited at Karl Heusner memorial hospital (for example they had to carry out dilation and curettage rather than vacuum aspiration for retained products of conception), which highlighted the difference in care options for those who cannot afford to pay for a private hospital.

I learnt during my time on this elective that, in Belize, access to maternal healthcare may be limited in rural areas, leading to disparities in maternal and neonatal outcomes. Efforts to improve access to prenatal care, skilled birth attendance, and emergency obstetric services are essential for reducing maternal mortality and improving maternal and child health outcomes.

5) Dengue Fever and Tropical Diseases: Whilst researching during my placement, I gained a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with treating dengue fever and other tropical diseases in Belize. Dengue fever poses a significant burden on the healthcare system, with outbreaks occurring frequently, especially during the rainy season. Hospital's resources are often strained due to the influx of patients presenting with dengue symptoms, ranging from mild to severe cases requiring intensive care.

To combat the transmission of dengue fever and other vector-borne diseases, healthcare authorities in Belize implement various strategies, including vector control measures, public education campaigns, and community engagement initiatives. However, limited resources and infrastructure pose significant challenges to effectively addressing the disease burden.

Patient education plays a crucial role in preventing and managing dengue fever. It is important that healthcare professionals engage with patients and their families to raise awareness about preventive measures, such as eliminating breeding sites for mosquitoes and using insect repellents. However, there remains a need for further investment in health education programs to reach vulnerable populations effectively.

The financial burden of tropical diseases on the local population is substantial, particularly for those from low-income backgrounds. Many patients struggle to afford the costs associated with medical treatment, including hospitalization and medication. Addressing the socioeconomic disparities that contribute to healthcare access is paramount to reducing the burden of tropical diseases in Belize.

Conclusion: My elective placement at Karl Heusner memorial hospital provided a multifaceted learning experience, exposing me to the complexities of healthcare delivery in Belize and the unique challenges faced by the local population. From the management of tropical diseases to surgical care, cultural influences on health, examination skills development, and obstetrics and gynaecology, each aspect of the placement contributed to my professional growth and understanding of global health disparities. Moving forward, I am committed to applying the knowledge and skills gained during my placement to contribute to improving healthcare outcomes, both locally and globally.