

## **ELECTIVE (SSC5a) REPORT (1200 words)**

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

### SSC5B Report: Gaining an understanding of the paediatric health care system in Canada

Having had the opportunity to complete a three-week placement in General Paediatrics at Garneau Paediatric Associates in Edmonton, Canada was a truly enriching and enlightening professional experience. This being my first experience within the healthcare system in Canada, as well as my first time in a complex medical needs Paediatrics clinic, gave me an opportunity to reflect and contrast with my preceding experiences during medical school in the United Kingdom (UK). In this report, I will be exploring the prevalent conditions seen in the Paediatrics clinic. Furthermore, I will explore how the healthcare services are organised and delivered, and how clinics like Garneau Paediatrics Associates are equipped to support their patients through their chronic illnesses - both during the acute hospitalisation phase, during follow up, and throughout the rest of their childhood into adulthood.

During my time at the clinic, I had the chance to see a variety of different patients, ranging from the newborn period up to adulthood. I encountered several different clinical presentations, from healthy development checks; to ear infections; to textbook classic biliary atresia; to a variety of rare genetic syndromes such as mucopolysaccharidosis and spinal muscle atrophy. This was an invaluable learning experience that allowed me to reflect on the multidimensional aspect of Paediatric as a medical specialty. Moreover, having encountered several patients who were ex-premature was an invaluable opportunity to consolidate my clinical knowledge on the complications of the latter, as well as reflect on how this may present later in childhood and during formative education years.

However, from all the presentations I encountered, I found the mental health presentations some of the most interesting, as well as some of the most difficult ones. Having the opportunity to interact with children who suffer from autism, ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, and even potential causes of PANDAS, was a truly valuable experience. It made me reflect on the emotional heaviness that comes alongside Paediatrics as a medical specialty and how important it is to be comfortable navigating these topics as an individual but also with the patient and their parents, to be able to best help them and address their concerns.

Furthermore, due to the nature of the patient demographic at Garneau Paediatric Associates, I had the chance to be a part of the care of patients with very complex social backgrounds, often in foster care and with a history of background exposure to drugs and alcohol in utero. This was a great opportunity for me to consider the topic of safeguarding within Paediatrics and to reflect on the importance, as a physician, to be aware of a child's social background (both at home and at school) in order to best help them and understand their health problems and needs.

Moving on to the organisation of the health service, I learnt that Canada is a publicly funded healthcare system in which residents have access to hospital and other professional services without having to pay out-of-pocket. The majority of healthcare spending is publicly funded by tax revenue, with the remainder being under the responsibility of the federal government through the Canada Health Transfer system. Each provincial government (for example, Alberta) is then responsible for the individual management and delivery of the services to their corresponding residents. I found this to be quite similar to the National Health Service (NHS) system back in the UK, other than the fact that the individual organisation is done by provincial territories, rather than as a whole. Moreover, it was interesting to learn that of a wide group of individuals that may receive extra healthcare benefits, the indigenous communities of Canada have additional benefits and funding should they need the same.

With regards to the actual delivery of services, Garneau Paediatrics Associates was quite unique, which in turn added to my learning experience. As well as dealing with children with complex medical needs, my supervisor lead and her partner are also the only two paediatricians in the area who still directly admit children into the Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton, should there be a need to do so. This means that they are providing care at the clinic during working hours, whilst simultaneously being on call at the hospital, should one of their hospitalised patients need care. Thus, during my placement, I also had the opportunity to join in on an evening ward round, and this was an invaluable learning experience. Not only did I have an opportunity to learn more about complex Paediatric care in a hospital setting, it was also a chance to reflect on the importance of continuity of care and the significant difference that makes in patient outcomes and parental reassurance and happiness.

Following on from this, I found that Garneau Paediatrics Associate as well as the healthcare system in Canada are quite well equipped to support children to have these complex medical needs. The clinic has several terminal and chronic patients, which means they are quite well versed in all the logistics of how to best help the patients - for example, they often accept healthy siblings as a way to make it easier for parents to coordinate their children's care. Furthermore, they are often the first point of contact should parents need extra support from the government or from educational services - whether that entails helping with applications for Disability Tax Credits or with finding the correct educational or psychological support for their patients.

Overall, this experience was extremely valuable. As a medical student that has always had an interest in Paediatrics, being able to engage with such complex patients in such a unique clinic has been a crucial professional experience for my own learning, as well as personal development. It has allowed me to reflect on the multidimensional aspects of Paediatrics, as well as the intricacies and the multitude of areas of practice. This experience and this placement has certainly shown me that Paediatrics is the speciality that I want to go into in the future, which I will always be grateful for. Lastly, it has given me a great sense of perspective, and it was truly an amazing opportunity to consolidate and gain new knowledge, which I will undoubtedly be thankful for when I start my first Foundation Year rotation in Paediatrics as a newly qualified doctor in July.