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MAHMOOD
ANAESTHETIST

My placement in Tobago Regional Hospital was in anaesthesia. This placement allowed me to see and practice both my surgical and anaesthetic skills. My day would start at 8am where I would assist in pre-op assessment, then follow a single patient from this point to pre-op, where I would cannulate the same patient and then assist in intubation, sometimes intubating the patient myself under supervision from the anaesthetist. I would then follow this patient into post-op, and assist in setting up the patient controlled analgesia. I found this a helpful way of learning and putting into practice all the skills I had learned in medical school. I believe this practice will come in handy when I start working in August.

As I was placed in anaesthesia, I only saw surgical complaints. These were very broad and ranged from lipoma excisions to hernia operations. As well as general surgery, every week there were 2 days that were set aside for obstetrics and gynaecology, and here I saw hysterectomies. Unfortunately I never saw any ENT surgery, as such specialist surgery or any massive trauma cases were sent to Trinidad. I was told this will change when the new hospital opens fully.

The majority of patients that I saw in Tobago suffered from diabetes and hypertension. These diseases are very prevalent globally, regardless of where one goes in the world. However I must say after observing the diet of Tobagonian's, the prevalence of these two diseases doesn't surprise me. A lot of the food here is fried and is high in calories and saturated fats. The people here also eat a lot of fast food such as KFC, which again compounds the situation, and this can be seen from the obesity rate. With such high levels of obesity, diabetes and hypertension I haven't seen any active form of public awareness or health advice. I have also noticed that smoking and drinking beer is very popular, almost as if the people think smoking is good for them. Again, I have not seen any active form of smoking cessation in a public environment or hospital.

The healthcare provided in the hospital to the people of Tobago was surprisingly similar to that provided in the UK, the only difference was in the setting and atmosphere in the hospital. The hospital was very different to those in the UK, mainly with the hygiene and equipment available. Saying this, the hospital had very stringent hygiene rules inside the operating theatre, as the operating theatre floor was cleaned after every patient. The wards were a different matter though, and were very different from those found in the UK. The beds were very closely packed together and not all had drapes, hence there was a lack of privacy. A lot of the equipment was reused, such as laryngeal mask airways, and oxygen masks, however this was probably due to a lack of equipment. I couldn't fault the anaesthetists in their practice and they didn't let the lack of equipment affect their practice.

I was quite surprised to find all the treatment options available in Tobago, as I was expecting more of a third world type of healthcare. In actual fact there was no real difference in treatment options available when comparing to the UK. There was laparoscopic surgery occurring in the hospital and with a transition of services into a newly built state of the art hospital, even more treatment options would be available in the future. A lot of the equipment used was similar to what I use in the UK, such as the cannulae and giving sets for fluid.

From carrying out my own pre-op assessments, I learnt how to rephrase questions in order to extrapolate information from patients. I also learnt how to adapt my skills in a different environment, learning how to improvise for example using a glove as a tourniquet and cannulating patients in a corner of the room, whilst they are sat on a stool.

I am very grateful to all the anaesthetists and surgeons for providing me with this opportunity to learn and experience healthcare in the Caribbean. I am glad I came to Tobago Regional Hospital before it moved to the new site and the new state of the art hospital.