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GENERAL

MEDICINE

The time I spent in HuaHin in Thailand was a very constructive & enriching experience – a real eye opener. I had not had many pre-conceived notions of the health care system in Thailand but I assumed it wouldn't have the best amenities and would be more akin to a healthcare system of a developing country. While this was true in some respects, the efficiency of the hospital given its limited resources was immense. They did a very good job of managing a huge workload of patients from the local area and beyond while providing high standards of care. Seeing first hand, the 'less privileged' being managed medically where the health system is not as efficient as in UK, made me realise how much we take things for granted.

I felt that a lot of the equipment was well maintained albeit a little dated and some of the latest equipment that we use regularly in the UK like laparoscopy; was not available to doctors and hence other means of surgery and exploration would have to be undertaken. While all equipment used seemed to be sterilised and all clothes washed, I felt there were many instances where health and safety and infection control wasn't taken into account. Having said that, their incidences of MRSA and C. diff were almost non-existent. Perhaps this was due to their careful use of antibiotics, or the fact that the cleanliness standards were not excruciatingly high so drug resistant strains of disease were less likely to emerge.

The disease epidemiology was varied with the incidences of infective disease going down in recent years due to better facilities available and better sanitation facilities available provided. The main causes of death were cancer, heart attack and gastrointestinal diseases.

The work ethic of the Thai doctors impressed me. They were very hard working and supportive of each other, while remaining humble and very respectful towards their seniors. The junior doctors always helped each other out when their own jobs had been completed and there was a real attitude of a hurdle being 'everyone's problem'. They also had to do many procedures that junior doctors wouldn't be allowed to do in the UK, like caesarean sections and tubal ligations. Since there was limited staff and equipment, it was more of a case of – 'this needs to be done, so I shall learn how to do it, not pass the buck.' Their ability to speak English was limited, although their technical grasp of our language was far superior to their daily vocabulary since they learn medicine from American and British textbooks but rarely speak it out loud.

Many 'incidents' stand clear in my memory & I'd like to mention a few.

- 1) A 35 year old lady with the Bartholin's abscess where an Incision & drainage was performed without an anaesthetic. The assistant who held her hand acted as a 'vocal local' which sufficed.
- 2) The boy who came in with a small branch sticking out of his cheek – an unusual sight in an A&E dept in UK, was handled calmly & efficiently although I felt that adequate pain relief was not provided immediately.
- 3) A caesarian section was performed in under 10 minutes by a junior doctor.
- 4) A face reconstruction was performed by a plastic surgeon with equipment which was more at place in UK about 10 years ago. But the end result was magnificent.
- 5) Anti-septic solution is expensive & hard to come by hence distilled water is used for a lot of wound cleansing & irrigation. And all beds have a underlying pan to collect water along with blood and other bodily fluids.

- 6) A man who came in after being bitten by a rabid dog had to undergo xray's without any pain relief given for a long time.

In a developing country, many 'basic amenities' may not be available, but the true calling of a doctor –to relieve pain & suffering always comes to the forefront. Their attitude towards medicine and their patients was a very non-competitive, altruistic approach which made me see them more as healers than doctors. Although their technical medical knowledge was of high quality.

In Thailand, the work culture, the courtesy, kindness & respect shown to others taught me a valuable lesson about 'people skills' & caring. The innate goodness & hospitality of the Thai people impressed me.

The same basic concepts of "First do no harm" (Primum non nocere)", ethical values & confidentiality upheld in the Hippocratic oath, shine out as a beacon equally in the developed world as in a developing country.