

ACCIDENT +
EMERGENCY

Victoria Whittaker

Elective reflection

Name: Victoria Whittaker

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Subject: Emergency medicine/acute care

I completed my five week elective period at the A&E department. It was what I expected although after meeting with my consultant and, declaring an interest in the training program for emergency medicine, it was decided I would also spend a week in the Early Admissions Unit (EAU) and a week on the Intensive Care Unit (ITU). Having spent time in all these areas during my time at medical school the placement was what I expected, however I gained much more insight into each of these areas of the hospital, having only spent a week in these departments whilst studying.

I had lots of clinical experience, I was able to take histories and examine patients in acute situations; I took many histories in the minors department, seeing patients and presenting them to the doctors in the area. I also spent time in majors and resus. Seeing patients, especially in minors, who often present with vague symptoms that do not fall into a typical presentation was extremely valuable as it made me think more broadly when clerking patients. On the EAU I accompanied consultant led ward rounds and then shadowed the junior doctors on the ward. On ITU I saw many procedures performed on the ward, such as central lines, both subclavian and internal jugular, and tracheostomies. I did my elective in the UK in an area I am familiar with, having spent time there previously, however I did learn more about the local and the population demographic in terms of health related issues. Yet, as I spent the majority of my time in the A&E department, I saw patients acutely with presenting complaints that are common to most Emergency departments throughout the country, such as soft tissue injuries and fractures. One of the reasons I wanted to complete this elective was to see whether my interest in emergency medicine would be something I would like to pursue as a career in this specialty, or something I would enjoy doing a rotation in during my foundation year training. I was able to spend time with both consultants and trainees about the job and the training, not only about emergency medicine, but also Anaesthetics – another area I am very interested in, having completed an SSC in my final year in this specialty. With

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regards to A&E I learnt that the department work very well as a team, with the staff being on friendly terms – I believe this is very important, especially in an emergency situation, where situations are often very high pressured.

As I completed my elective in the UK the healthcare system is the same in East Staffordshire as in East London, and so the objectives I had set to compare the two areas was very difficult. However, being able to spend a more substantial amount of time in A&E than I have done previously in my training I was able to enquire more about how the department runs, with A&E clinics etc. and different targets that are set and how these are met. One difficulty facing most A&Es is seeing patients within the allotted time frame.

I really enjoyed my time in A&E. The best bits, for me, included being made to feel welcome and one of the team, something which does not happen all the time as a student. The team I worked with were very friendly. I found ITU very interesting; being able to observe and assist with procedures, and also being in the resus area of the department. I enjoyed meeting and speaking to other students who were there, from a different medical school and participating in their teaching.

There were no particular aspects that I least enjoyed, but I did feel that the A&E clinics, although useful, were something that I did not need to attend more than the two times that I sat in, as patients were being reviewed, not acutely presenting.

The shortcomings of the placement were the same as those I have experienced on other firms in the UK – there were often times of waiting and often finding it difficult to find a free doctor to present to, but this was minimal.

I would recommend this placement to another student, especially if they have an interest in emergency medicine and would like more experience in the area. The team were very welcoming and more than happy to answer my questions about the training and careers paths etc.

If I were to do this elective again I would do more evening shifts when the department was busier, as although it has its downfalls, such as the medical staff have an increased work load and thus less time to spend with you, there is a higher footfall of patients.

I learnt that I do enjoy emergency medicine and that I would like to complete a foundation year rotation in an A&E department, hopefully in my Foundation Year 2. I am also going to look into the possibility of ACCS training. This rotation, after finals, has allowed me to build up my confidence and helped me to prepare for transition from student to foundation year doctor – a personal objective I set with my consultant before the placement started.

There were no deviations from the risk assessment.

I am originally from the area and so I lived at my parents house during my elective, however accommodation is available from the hospital. I drove to the hospital, which provided me with permits and passes so that I did not have to pay to access parking. For future students who are considering completing the elective, I would recommend the placement; the staff are very welcoming, and the patients were often nice too! There is, as I mentioned previously, accommodation available. It is very interesting to see a different, quite rural district general hospital after becoming accustomed to East London and is something I would recommend!