

Elective Report

Anaesthetics had always been a keen interest of mine, and without much exposure at undergraduate level, I was passionate to experience the practical and theoretical side in more detail. I began the Tygerberg Hospital application process for my elective placement in Cape Town, South Africa, around 15 months in advance. South Africa had long been a destination I wanted, due to its juxtaposition of different socioeconomic climates, English speaking and variety of pathologies. I focused on achieving three key aims:

1. To advance my knowledge of anaesthesiology, an area of medicine we had not formally covered in our own placements, and perform an audit/research study
2. To improve my clinical skills ahead of my foundation training year
3. To gain an understanding of different medical systems

During my placement, I was fortunate to learn a lot about anaesthesiology, with my knowledge improving each week I was there. Whereas I began with a vague idea about some of the drugs used, by the end I had gained an understanding about the pharmacokinetics and -dynamics of each agent. I performed an audit on the number of elective Caesarean sections that were cancelled each day. Cancellations had long been a problem due to the sheer number of emergency cases presenting; the audit aimed to identify an area for resource allocation. During my data collection, the information I gathered suggested cancellations were variable, suggesting the need for a longer study.



I had the opportunity to perform several clinical skills, albeit some that I had not anticipated performing. I performed intubation, set up lines and even a spinal anaesthetic under supervision. Whilst these opportunities were too few and far between to feel experienced, it was exciting to be involved in that moment of complete control when the patient has exposed the three key components of anaesthesia: hypnosis, muscle relaxation and analgesia.

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One great success was in my understanding of different medical systems. Following my intercalated year in Clinical Epidemiology, my interest in how politics and healthcare are tied increased. Not only did I gain knowledge of the South African system, but by discussing with various doctors and students from around the world, I gained a more holistic idea about international medicine. In general, the doctors were highly skilled and extremely good teachers, which made for an excellent placement.

Whilst low points were rare, perhaps I regret not getting more exposure to other areas of the hospital. I had anticipated a spell in critical or emergency care during my time in anaesthetics, which did not occur. In this respect, I did not experience first-hand the front door medicine for which South Africa is renowned. However, with more experience and more time, I would have relished the opportunity to get involved in these areas.

Healthcare provision in South Africa has comparable disparity to its marred political history. Private, plush medical centres provide first class care, whilst government funded healthcare is filled with many excellent doctors who are sometimes simply outweighed by the patient load and scarce resources. The most striking comparison is the limited relationship often built between patient and doctor; a distance away from the patient-centred care that is focused upon in UK medical training. It is an area, I understand, that South African medical schools are aiming to improve.

If I had the opportunity again, I would have liked to spend more time in the emergency theatres, or had some time to see the trauma rooms as part of my placement. Simply, the opportunity to improve your clinical skills in the emergency and trauma rooms are far greater. Meanwhile, others tell me that it is in those rooms that you see the darker side of this beautiful country, which, whilst not a pleasant experience, is almost unique. I would also request to be paired to a local student/junior, as associating yourself with as many local students and professionals helps identify learning opportunities that suit you better. This is of course not to say that I regret my decision, I still had a brilliant placement that has taught me much.

Overall it was an extremely useful time and experience spent shadowing in Tygerberg Hospital.

