

AAGBI Elective Report

I recently undertook my elective placement in the anaesthetic department at Scarborough General Hospital, the only hospital on the island of Tobago in the Caribbean. Tobago has a small population of approximately 50,000 residents with a spectrum of disease not dissimilar to that of the UK. There is a high prevalence of type 2 diabetes mellitus and essential hypertension, often related to obesity.

The hospital was a smaller version of many UK hospitals. It was well equipped with knowledgeable staff in an equivalent hierarchy to that of the NHS. The surgical and anaesthetic team treated a range of conditions including general surgical, colorectal, vascular, orthopaedic, paediatric, obstetric and gynecological and ophthalmological diseases. These were treated by staff of many nationalities, many of whom split their time between treating patients in Tobago and patients on the neighbouring island of Trinidad where trauma cases are more commonplace.

I spent my time with the anaesthetic department. This was a large team considering there were only two operating theatres in the hospital, including 4 consultants as well as their registrars, SHO's and house officers. During my time I helped prepare patients pre, peri and postoperatively for surgery, had several teaching sessions to build my theoretical knowledge of anaesthesia, and had some opportunities for practical skill development including airway management, intubation and vascular access. This was performed on patients with presentations and comorbidities very similar to the UK, and was therefore directly applicable to my upcoming work as an FY1 in the NHS.

The anaesthetic medications and knowledge of the staff was similar to that of UK practice. However, I observed a much more paternalistic approach in the doctor-patient relationship in Tobago. Often, there was little explanation as to why a certain treatment or intervention was most appropriate, as it was expected that the patient simply trust the doctor. However, the anaesthetic team was always able to gain the trust and confidence of their patients.

In sharp contrast to the UK, the hospital often appeared to be overstaffed. Each theatre regularly had three members of the anaesthetic team and more than one student, limiting the learning opportunities for both students and junior doctors. Nonetheless, the senior clinicians would regularly make a conscious effort to teach me theoretical principles intra-operatively including physiology, pharmacology and pathophysiology.

Tobago as an island was simply beautiful. From stunning beaches to extremely friendly people, it more than lived up to expectations of being a paradise island. In terms of my elective experience, I was very happy with the level of teaching I received and how welcoming the team was. However, due to the volume of staff and students in each theatre, I was disappointed to not have had more practical experience. Having had very little experience in anaesthetics during medical school, this placement definitely helped boost my knowledge of the subject and make me more comfortable at managing a patient's airway, all of which will be invaluable when beginning my upcoming FY1 placement.