

## Mohammed Alwan- Elective Report, Mongolia

In the summer of 2018, I was most fortunate to be able to spend the four weeks of my medical elective in Mongolia. Coming back to England with the wealth of knowledge I acquired makes me feel incredibly privileged to have been able to go there. I want to thank the AAGBI for their generosity in helping so many students like myself embark on their elective adventures.

There were many reasons why I chose to travel to Mongolia for my elective. Perhaps the foremost reason was to experience something different, and I certainly was not let down there. Even before entering the hospital setting, it was clear what makes the country so unique. Mongolia is the most sparsely populated country in the world; and with 50% of the 3 million inhabitants living in the capital Ulaanbaatar, you can learn so much about the people and the way of life there. The friendliness and generosity of the Mongolian people is well known, but it is only by experiencing it yourself that you begin to really appreciate the extent of it. Everywhere you go, people are more than happy to speak to you, find out if you're okay, and help you with anything.

My time spent in the hospitals seemed to fly by, with every single day providing opportunities to learn something new. A small district general hospital on the outskirts of the capital is where I spent the first two weeks of my elective. I worked with a vast number of doctors as well as nurses; and was able to get a really good sense of how patient care is delivered. I was also fortunate to spend considerable time learning about the speciality which I have the most passion for, anaesthetics. From speaking to the anaesthetist taking charge of an open appendectomy, to the senior doctors in the stretched intensive care unit; I was really able to explore the specialty in a way which would not be possible in the UK.

What I found most striking was the patient's tolerance towards pain. From young to old, analgesia was used at a bare minimum in every setting I witnessed. We take pain relief very seriously here in the UK, and anaesthetists are often at the forefront of delivering the best possible care to prevent patient suffering with pain. However, from what I witnessed, it seemed the Mongolian people have developed a culture whereby experiencing pain is a normal part of a hospital attendance. Whether this is good or bad is certainly debatable

For the second two weeks, I travelled to Nalaikh; a small town situated an hour's car journey from the capital. I was able to experience the more rural side of medicine in Mongolia, with some patients having to travel vast distances to come into the hospital. I also spent a day with the paramedics covering the towns' annual celebration- the festival of Naadam. Considering the festival includes wrestling, and children as young as four years old riding horses, the need for first aid assistance is

necessary to say the least. Thankfully, on the day there no such problems and we were able to enjoy the festivities.



The ambulance vehicle that transported 9 people, including myself, to the local Naadam festival

During my time in Mongolia, I delivered English language teaching sessions for staff at the hospital. Until 20 years ago, Mongolians second language was Russian, with a very small proportion of the population speaking the English language. By learning English, the staff are able to work with international agencies, attend events and build up their knowledge base. This was an enormously rewarding part of the elective for me personally. I found the staff most grateful for the teaching which radiated in the effort and commitment they put into the sessions. Every session was unique, from simple grammar to storytelling, we covered a range of topics to suit their needs.