

Medical elective in Zambia – Kojo Minta Research & Travel Award 2015

As a final year medical student I spent my medical elective in Zambia, working at the Salvation Army Mission hospital in Chikankata. I had spent six years studying medicine at St Hilda's and I have been extremely lucky to benefit from the amount of interest and support that the college provides to its students. I met Kojo on several occasions during my time at Oxford, and although I never knew him well I saw how he was always enthusiastic to support college and MCR events and initiatives.

In Zambia I spent six weeks working with the four doctors who ran the hospital and a range of community clinics. I became quite proficient at plastering the broken limbs of children who had fallen out of trees, and tried my best to learn some Tonga, the local language. The hospital had very limited resources, and as a result on some days there were no blood pressure tablets and patients were asked to walk back to the hospital the next week to see if any had arrived.



One particularly memorable patient was a small, severely malnourished boy called Bernard who spent the first week of his admission staring listlessly at the side of his cot. He gained weight slowly due to the persistence of his mum feeding him “pulpy nuts” (peanut butter). I was delighted that on my last day on the ward he was able to walk over to the desk where I was working to show me that the red balloon I had given him had burst.

Despite the lack of resources available, I was impressed by the range of conditions the hospital was able to treat and the compassion that the staff showed for their patients. I hope that I will be able to translate this resourcefulness and humanity in to my future work as a junior doctor.

Alice Kent, (Medicine, 2008)

