

Clinical placement in Paediatrics at Groote Schuur Hospital, Cape Town, South Africa

In March I travelled to South Africa to undertake a clinical placement in paediatrics at Groote Schuur Hospital, Cape Town. Whilst paediatrics is a core component of the medical curriculum in year 5, this provided me with a unique opportunity to experience working in a health care system very different from the NHS.

Groote Schuur Hospital is a large public hospital world famous for being the place where Dr Christian Barnard performed the first successful human heart transplant. I spent four weeks with another medical student from Oxford working with the team on the paediatrics and adolescent ward. A typical day would begin with a large ward round led by the consultant Dr Roux, this was a good opportunity to see all the patients and learn alongside the local doctors and students. In the afternoons we were able to develop our clinical skills by examining patients on the ward, or attend clinics for children and adolescents with HIV and TB. We also had the opportunity to visit a clinic in one of the townships on the outskirts of Cape Town. It was quite shocking to see the huge number of patients packed into the waiting room desperate to see the doctor as they could not afford to make the journey to the hospital in the city.

Whilst some of the patients had medical conditions that you would expect to see on a paediatric ward in the UK, I was struck by the prevalence of HIV, TB, and malnutrition. The paediatric department at the hospital had been involved in setting up a local charity Kids Positive; through this they had been able to train a wonderful team of counsellors to educate and support patients and their families. In any one day their work might include teaching a mother how to give the HIV prophylaxis medication her baby, helping a family to gain access to adequate nutritional supplies for the children, or supporting a teenager struggling with the social issues and stigma that can be associated with HIV/AIDS.

Overall this was a wonderful experience that helped me to gain a more global perspective on health and disease, something I hope to develop medical career progresses. I must also say that I had a fantastic time exploring Cape Town outside of the hospital, it is not every day that you can hike up Table Mountain after work! I am extremely grateful to the Kojo Minta Travel award for helping me to fund this experience.

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