

Port Vila Central Hospital, Vanuatu - Elective Report

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Where I went and why did I go there?

I went to Vanuatu, a string of islands in the tropical South Pacific, which are best thought of as being at the same longitude as New Zealand and the same latitude as the north of Australia. The population is around 250,000 and the economy would be described as developing. The second largest island, Efate, is home to the capital city - Port Vila. I lived in a region of Port Vila called Elluk and worked at the largest hospital in the country - Port Vila Central. It is one of two public hospitals in the country, and the only one to have surgical theatres. It has medical, surgical, paediatric and obstetric wards.

I chose Port Vila as I wanted to experience medicine in a (more) resource-limited setting than the NHS and to do some surfing on world class reefs.

What did I plan to do and what did I actually do?

I planned to throw myself into hospital life, mainly staying in ED. The organiser of the placement was not very organised and refused to let us know where we would be working before we arrived leading to considerable worry that I'd be on obstetrics which I did not want to do. Another important part of my elective plan was to train local surfers in surf lifesaving techniques - something I have been teaching for 6 years and doing as a summer job for 9 years. I had been in touch with some locals in the Vanuatu Surfing Association who had expressed an interest in some training.

It turned out we were the only students at the hospital for most of the time so we had pick of the wards. I ended up doing a few weeks of everything (including obstetrics, which I enjoyed to my surprise), and only went into ED once though. ED was very quiet and small (1 bed and no permanent staff) so a bad place to get any teaching. We also got to visit a rural nurse led clinic for 2 days which was extremely interesting. The surf lifesaving training turned out to be a more important part of the elective than I had envisaged - many evenings and weekends were full with some sort of training session I would be running or event I'd help out with. It was also an excellent way to integrate with the local people and learn about life in Vanuatu.