

I spent this summer on an 8 week medical elective placement, split between the countries of Tanzania and Zambia. Of this, I spent four weeks in Tanzania (Teule Hospital) and three weeks in Zambia (University Teaching Hospital) – the former a rural DGH and the latter a tertiary referral centre – with another week spent travelling around Tanzania. I chose these hospitals because I hoped that between them I would have a diverse range of experiences in low resource settings: I'd see diseases and healthcare systems that are radically different from those in the UK, gain practical experience in a range of specialties, and experience cultures that I hadn't before.

Teule Hospital in Muheza, Tanzania is a fairly small district hospital with eight wards covering paediatrics, surgery, medicine, obstetrics and ICU, plus an outpatients department and (very unusually for Tanzania) a hospice which also runs clinics for HIV and TB patients. Attached to Teule Hospital there is a school for Clinical Officers and nurses, which many of the doctors are involved with, meaning that they were well-practiced at teaching and we frequently met local students on the wards. I chose to divide my time to experience all the specialties: spending the longest on Medicine and Paediatrics, but also fitting in some Palliative Care home visits, a couple of days in theatre/on the surgical wards, and observing a few births in between. As an elective student I had largely an observational role, attending ward rounds and watching procedures, though I found that the doctors treated our presence as a great privilege and were very happy to teach/translate/explain things, and would often ask (and follow!) our advice.

UTH in Lusaka, Zambia was a very different experience. This hospital was similar in size to Addenbrooke's, and similar in practice – if not always resource availability. It is also a centre for a range of research and audit projects, carried out both by local doctors and visiting experts from Western universities. My three weeks in UTH were spent exclusively in the Children's Hospital, with a week each on Malnutrition, General Paediatric and PICU/admissions wards respectively. Here I was encouraged to take a much more active role in patient care: clerking admissions, performing clinical skills and running errands around the hospital, and I really enjoyed the opportunity to gain more practical experience and make a useful contribution to the day-to-day running of the wards. Over the three weeks I became far more skilled at practical procedures and triaging admissions and gained a lot of confidence in communicating with patients and parents.

At weekends and in the additional week set aside for travelling I managed to see a great deal of both countries and had a fantastic time exploring and immersing myself in Tanzanian and African culture – particular highlights were visiting Victoria Falls, and a 3 day safari. The elective as a whole was an incredible eight weeks, challenging at times but overall deeply rewarding and a life-changing educational experience.