

ADAM TRUELOVE – MEDICAL ELECTIVE 2018 ANTIGUA & SAINT LUCIA

I undertook my elective in Mount St John's Medical Centre, Antigua and Barbuda, and Victoria Hospital, Saint Lucia. Both Caribbean islands are Commonwealth nations that gained independence in the last few decades, but are vastly different in terms of their geography, culture, and heritage. I wanted to visit more resource-deplete countries (in terms of healthcare provisions) where English was still the primary language to gain an understanding of how hospitals and governments adapt to such budgetary constraints.

Both countries rely heavily on tourism for more than half of their GDP, and have few actual exports. Fortunately, Antigua itself and Saint Lucia were spared from the devastating hurricanes last year, but Barbuda was not so lucky, and is still recovering. Although there is a Red Cross presence on Barbuda, all the healthcare services have been taken over by the other half of the country, Antigua, and despite not causing any actual damage, both Antigua and Saint Lucia were affected by the dip in tourism as a result.

My original plans involved me doing a rotation between various departments in Antigua (Paediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Internal Medicine, and General Surgery), and a single rotation in Emergency Medicine in Saint Lucia. However, due to administrative issues beyond my control, my first rotation at Mount St John's was purely in Paediatrics, and I had a General Surgery rotation at Victoria Hospital.

On the Paediatrics ward in Mount St John's Medical Centre, I became a well-integrated member of the team, mostly assisting in pre-round and ward round duties. The ward rounds were very teaching heavy, and I gained skills in a variety of topics: history taking, examinations, diagnosis and management of diseases rarely seen in the UK (especially sickle cell anaemia), and management of emergency situations. The ward rounds themselves were relatively time- and labour-intensive, with every patient needing to be clerked again every day and presented again at the ward rounds by either one of the interns or myself. I also had the opportunity to develop my practical skills in not only paediatrics, but also in the neonatal unit. This was an opportunity I had not had before as a medical student, and I assisted with venepuncture, cannulation, and even a ventricular tap.

One of the most memorable cases of my elective involved me assisting with an emergency resuscitation of a young child with sickle cell anaemia. From my perspective, it was the first time I had seen resuscitation in a paediatrics patient, and the first time I've been asked to assist with resuscitation outside of a simulation. Fortunately, the team are well versed in these types of emergencies, and the patient thankfully recovered and was discharged a few days later.

During General Surgery in Victoria Hospital, I participated in both ward rounds and theatre lists of various surgical sub-specialties. Many of the inpatients on the wards and in theatres had much more severe disease manifestations than what I am used to in the UK; for example, amputations are relatively common in Saint Lucia, due to poor diabetic control and the resultant infections of untreated vascular ulcers, and I had an opportunity to witness not one amputation, but many, for the first time.

Conditions were very different in the two hospitals, with Victoria Hospital struggling considerably more for staffing and resources. Despite a new hospital having been built by the EU for Saint Lucia (OKEU Hospital), it was not being used during my stay due to political reasons; while Mount St John's Medical Centre was better resourced, despite suffering from the similar issues in other fields, such as expense of investigations, an intermittent drug supply, and lack of public health, social care, and mental health services.

Whilst out there, I also had the opportunity to explore both islands and visit neighbouring countries such as Montserrat and Martinique. Despite being relatively close to each other, Antigua and Saint Lucia were vastly different countries to experience; Antigua is very flat and quite dry, with beaches along almost the entire coast, whilst Saint Lucia was incredibly green and mountainous. My personal highlights included successfully

managing to climb one of the Pitons, learning how to kitesurf and paddleboard, and the incredible Carnival in Saint Lucia. I would thoroughly recommend both hospitals and countries to other students for their electives.