

ELECTIVE REPORT

During my elective, I was able to visit a large hospital, the Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospital located in Whitefield, India. This super specialty hospital focused on cardiology, neurology and their associated surgical procedures. During my first visit, I received a warm welcome and was given a pass to access the hospital as a trainee staff member. Having sat down with a cardiology specialist who oversaw our elective at the hospital, a suitable schedule was created allowing time to be spent in both cardiology and neurology departments.

Upon my first visit to the hospital, I was impressed by both the size and the architectural beauty of the hospital. It looked like an expensive and established hospital and I was keen to observe the facilities and the staff at work. At the gates of the hospital, a large queue of people could be seen waiting for entry and I soon came to know that all the treatment provided by the hospital was completely free for patients. The hospital itself was built by a well-known religious figure, Sri Sathya Sai Baba and catered to patients who had travelled from all over India for free specialist healthcare.

On the first day, I was able to sit in with specialist cardiologists and observe echocardiography. The session went on for approximately 2-3 hours but in this time period alone, I was able to observe nearly all of the cardiac defects that I had read about in textbooks. Indeed, heart defects were very common in India and the explanation for this being due to the fact that many congenital heart defects had not been detected at birth or early in life due to poor access to healthcare. Therefore, many patients had grown into adults with their congenital heart defects being left untreated and causing symptoms. I also noticed how efficient and quick the doctors were in detecting and referring the patients, and this was due to the sheer volume of patients passing through the door. One cardiologist explained that they would often see more than a hundred patients in a day. In truth, the work looked exhausting, almost unrelenting, but the cardiologists would plough on with the echocardiography as the patients continued to pour into the room in groups of threes. I was also able to visit echocardiography on a few other occasions, which provided a sense of familiarity in recognising heart defects on the screen and the various views used in obtaining a clear view of any valvular dysfunction to note.

The echocardiography would often take place in the morning sessions and I was able to sit in cardiology clinics in the afternoon. These clinics would often deal with the echocardiography referrals gathered earlier in the morning. The focus would be on treatment which may include further referrals to other hospitals, medication or surgery. The clinic was also used to review many patients and help resolve any problems being experienced after their initial treatment. The structure of the clinic seemed to be in the form of a short history, a quick examination and observing echocardiograms and electrocardiograms on the computer database, followed by creating a new management plan for the patient. During the clinics, I was able to examine patients myself, observe imaging results and electrocardiograms and contribute towards appropriate management plans. However, the language barrier with patients made it difficult to take a history and elicit details from patients. Therefore, the doctor undertaking the clinic would often give me a brief summary of the patient history once they had consulted the patient. I came to understand that doctors would have

to understand vocabulary in at least up to five languages due to the vast cultural variations of the patients who had travelled from many different parts of India seeking specialist healthcare.

Once I had finished my time in cardiology, I was able to move onto the section of the hospital dedicated to neurology and neurosurgery. Similar to my cardiology placement, I was able to spend time in neurology clinics that would review previous patients and deal with new referrals for surgery. During my time here, I was able to see many patients with neurological signs and muscular problems. It was particularly useful to practice my cranial and peripheral neurological examinations and elicit signs and symptoms from patients. I found this more challenging due to the various grading measures and the many different steps involved in these examinations.

During our time at the hospital, I was particularly privileged to be able to watch neurosurgical procedures. I found this to be very interesting and the surgeons were excellent in explaining procedures and connecting up cameras so that I could gain the best possible view of what they were observing and the actions that they were performing. Since I have not been able to watch many neurosurgical procedures during my time in medical school, I found this particularly interesting and insightful.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my placement at the hospital and would recommend the experience to others. I was able to not only see the specialist cardiology and neurology areas of the hospital but also the variation in patient population in comparison to the United Kingdom and the differences in healthcare. This includes being able to see the huge numbers of patients who came in with untreated congenital heart defects for example, which provided valuable insight into the different health problems in India and how access to healthcare has caused a vast problem. This particular hospital was providing free healthcare for patients due to its' religious background and I could see how much the patients appreciated this. This was endearing to see and in the future, I hope that I too can carry out some similar work to help those who really struggle and have poor access to healthcare; something we truly take for granted in developed countries.