

## **Elective report: General Medicine**

**Describe the pattern of disease/ illness of interest in the population with which you will be working and discuss this in the context of global health**

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Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of all mortality in the United Kingdom and accounts for nearly one in three deaths. However, this number continues to increase despite the increased prescription of drugs, such as statins to lower cholesterol and antihypertensives to maintain a healthy blood pressure and other therapeutics to control blood glucose levels.

In the UK, there is an overall prevalence of type 2 diabetes of 4.6% (Diabetes UK). Although the prevalence correlates with aging, increasingly children and adolescents are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Modifiable risk factors for type 2 diabetes include lack of physical exercise, obesity, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia.

East London has a demographic which is, in part, made up of socio-economically deprived itinerant population, for whom many English is not a language spoken. This communication barrier presents a challenge for healthcare professionals tasked with health promotion. Tower Hamlets in particular has a higher than national prevalence of diabetes, 6.1%, and alongside other cardiovascular diseases, this is rising faster than the national average (Tower Hamlets Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2010-2011).

**Describe the pattern of health provision in relation to the country in which you will be working**

The prevalence of cardiovascular disease increases with increasing age. Patients are counselled wherever the opportunity arises as to the importance of regular exercise and a healthy balanced diet. This is especially important as the primary risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes mellitus is obesity.

As well as verbal health promotion, NHS England conducts a national 'Health Check' programme in the setting of primary care to assess vascular risk and identify patients most at risk of developing preventable illnesses. This consists of tests to measure cholesterol, blood pressure, BMI (body mass index) and circulating glucose in addition to a detailed history concerning other modifiable risk factors such as smoking. This is one example of many strategies in place to support the prevention of cardiovascular disease.

Patients with a diagnosis of diabetes are automatically entered into a national screening programme for digital retinal imaging aimed at the early identification and treatment of diabetic retinopathy. Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of sight loss in the UK; it has been estimated that approximately 400 patients per year can be saved from blindness as a result of screening (Public Health England).

**Explore public health knowledge of cardiovascular disease**

Public knowledge of cardiovascular disease is increasing in my opinion. This is likely to be attributable, in part, to increased government health promotion. One such example is the 'five-a-day' campaign encouraging the intake of a minimum of five portions of fruit and vegetables every day as part of a balanced diet.

As mentioned above, many of the local population accessing healthcare services are unable to speak, read or write English. I was surprised to see leaflets (produced by the British Heart Foundation) in a multitude of languages spoken by locals (Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and Bengali) explaining the symptoms and consequences of diabetes, hypertension, angina and whole host of other cardiovascular diseases; this is a very useful (and free) tool.

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### **Personal/ professional development goals**

During my elective period, I spent as much time as possible in the 'acute medical unit' as this is the setting in which I shall be starting my first job as a foundation year doctor. Through my time spent on the ward, not only was I able to better understand the practical aspect of the job which I am due to start, but I was also able to gain an insight into whether this is a speciality of medicine in which I would like to pursue a career.