

## **SSC 5c REPORT** (word count: 1208)

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**Dates of elective:** 3 April – 8 May

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**Subject:** Clinical Method in Paediatrics

**Describe the pattern of disease/illness of interest in the population with which you worked and discuss this in the context of global health<sup>1</sup>.**

The leading causes of mortality in Cuba are similar to those of high-income countries. The most important are cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Other important causes are respiratory conditions, diabetes and accidental injury. The average life expectancy of Cubans is 77.5 years. Cuba has one of the lowest infant mortality rates worldwide, ie 4.76/1000 live births (cf UK: 4.50, US: 5.90) and mortality rate under 5 years old is 5/ 1000 l.b. (cf. UK: 4.8, US, 7.1)<sup>2</sup>.

**Describe the pattern of health provision in relation to the country in which you worked and contrast this with other countries, or with the UK<sup>3</sup>**

Cuba has the 2nd highest Doctor/1000 population ratio in the world (6.7) (cf. UK: 2.7, US: 2.4). In practice, every square block is assigned to a family doctor. Unlike many western countries who recruit doctors from low-income countries, Cuba trains and exports doctors to many developing countries around the world and promptly responds to every major humanitarian crisis worldwide. Cuba has an admirable national pharmaceutical industry and one of the most comprehensive vaccination programmes in the world. The Cuban health system is free and universal, with an immense focus in primary prevention and social medicine. Cuba responded to the financial crisis of the 1990s (the Special period) by investing in medical staff rather than high-tech equipment and infrastructure. In contrast, the UK has made its NHS increasingly dependent on the private sector by using leased premises (PFI, LIFT) and marketizing its services (HSC Act 2006, 2013), which effectively abolish the founding principles of the NHS and have doomed the future of public health in the UK. At an era where everybody talks about the need to restrict resources (e.g. cutting the Health care budget by 20%), the paradigm of the Cuban National Health Service can provide important lessons for setting our priorities and protecting the health of our nations.

### **Health related objective: Clinical method in Paediatrics**

I got exposure to a wide range of paediatric conditions by being rotated between many different paediatric sub-specialities (except. Mental health, community paediatrics and Paediatric Surgery). In every rotation, I had 2-3 tutorials with the supervising consultant. Following each tutorial, I went to the library and studied the corresponding topics in the Merck Manual and in Nelson's Textbook of Paediatrics (in Spanish). The fact that no one at the hospital could speak English was initially a challenge for me (I went to Cuba with only beginner's level of Spanish). However, I quickly adapted to the Cuban accent and by the end of the second week I could communicate effectively with colleagues. However, the task of history taking in Spanish was still very difficult for me (since patients/parents did not use medical terminology). In response, I had to meticulously study the patient's notes and also put a much greater emphasis on my clinical examination. In total, I completed 62 hours of teaching and 162 hours of practical work. The two rotations that I enjoyed most were Paediatric Neurology and Gastroenterology. Unfortunately it was not possible to spend any time in community care.

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<sup>1</sup>Answer also in Reflection

<sup>2</sup>Cuba Health Profile, World Health Organization (Available at: <http://www.who.int/gho/countries/cub.pdf?ua=1>. Accessed at 17/05/2014)

<sup>3</sup>Answer also in Reflection

However, I attended the outpatient nutrition clinics, which were particularly informative and enjoyable.

**Personal/professional development goals. Must also include some reflective assessment of your activities and experiences.**

This elective placement greatly consolidated my interest in paediatrics and constitutes an important foundation for the goals that I have set for the following year. This June, I have arranged to attend the specialist demyelination clinics at Great Ormond Street Hospital. Through this experience I aspire to gain more insight into paediatric Neurology and specifically multiple sclerosis in children (in which I wish to focus my research in the future). I believe that my elective will also be an important foundation for my paediatric rotation during the first year of the Foundation Programme.

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Hegel once wrote: *“Rulers, Statesmen and nations are often advised to learn the lesson of historical experience. But what experience and history teach is this – that nations and governments have never learned anything from history or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it [...] Only a thorough, open-minded, comprehensive view of historical situations and a profound sense for the **Idea**\* and its realisation in history can endow such reflections with truth and interest”*<sup>4</sup>

*\*Idea: the ultimate, ideal principle that progressively realises itself in history*

I must say that I never had any faith in political panaceas. History is full of examples (e.g. Russia, China, Eastern European block) where “socialist” regimes have betrayed and crippled nations in exactly the same way that western neoliberal regimes unashamedly do today. What is important to understand is that the wonders of Cuba, especially in the fields of health care, education and culture, are accomplishments of a nation, rather than a system. They are the product of the historical identity of the Cuban people, which was nourished by three wars for independence from Spain, before the unique constellation of geopolitical circumstances of the 1950s<sup>5</sup> allowed the Cuban revolution to materialize. I believe that the catalyst in this process was the **Idea**\* of an equal society, starting from racial equality, which was propagated from Carlos Cespedes to Antonio Maceo, Maximo Gomez and Jose Marti. It was this Idea that allowed people from different races to unite and fight side by side for their right to be sovereign. It was this Idea that allowed Cubans to realise the imperative necessity of collectivism, which is so deeply embedded in the Cuban society today. Finally, I believe, that it was this Idea that allowed the creation of the most profound and enduring example of resource redistribution of the 20th century. The strength of the Cuban identity became irrefutable following the collapse of the USSR and the Special period. Isolated financially from the rest of the world, Cuba managed to become the only country in the world with sustainable development (WWF, 2006).

An exemplification of the above is Habaguanex. This is a state-owned tourist company founded by the Historian of Havana. It runs hotels, restaurants and tourist shops in Old Havana. After covering cost, half of the income of Habaguanex is utilized for the restoration and maintenance of Old Havana buildings. The other half is channelled to social projects for the local population e.g. culture centres for the elderly, primary schools, schools for adults and many others. Unlike the other historical capitals that I have visited (Athens being the greatest example), the Cuban government never dared to displace the local population of Old Havana solely to create a “cleaner” image for the tourists. A nation that respects itself and has a solid identity, has no reason to hide its poverty. Numerous other examples of sustainable

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<sup>4</sup>Hegel, GWF (1894) Lectures on the Philosophy of World History translated by H.B. Nisbet (1974)

<sup>5</sup>The analysis of which is beyond the scope of this report.

development exist in the tourist industry of Cuba, such as ecotourism in Vinales and Las Terrazas.