

ELECTIVE (SSC5c) REPORT (1200 words)

A report that addresses the above four objectives should be written below. Your Elective supervisor will assess this.

Objective 1

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: What are the prevalent conditions treated by the Plastic Surgery department in China? How does it compare to the UK?

Plastic surgery services are typically divided between different hospitals that provide care within their chosen subspecialty. Therefore different hospitals deal with trauma, burns, malignancies, hands and aesthetics. My experience in Plastics in the UK was mostly based at the Royal London Hospital, which is the biggest trauma centre in Europe. They also do a lot of malignancies, often as part of the multidisciplinary team approach, be that with Dermatology, Oncology, ENT or General Surgery. My experience in China was based at the Zhongshan Hospital in Shanghai. From my observation and from what I was told by the Chief of Plastic Surgery department here, this hospital does not do trauma or burns or hands. Their main focus is on tumours of all kinds and aesthetics, with both standard and luxury wards being available for those two patient subsets. Because we don't really do aesthetics at the RLH, I can only comment on the disease pattern of the tumours. The most obvious observation is the stage at which tumours present. On my very first day I met a few patients with toe and finger amputations due to a late melanoma presentation. A lot of the benign tumours were also quite large by the time patients presented to the hospital, which then required large portions of skin being excised and either flap or graft reconstructions.

Objective 2

Describe the pattern of health provision in relation to the country that you will be working in and contrast this with other countries, or with the UK: How are Plastic Surgery Services organized and delivered in China? How does it compare to the UK?

My lack of understanding of Mandarin made it very difficult to discuss this thoroughly with the staff at the hospital, however the impression I got is that the services are mostly focused around the secondary care rather than primary. The hospitals are huge compared to the UK ones and there are a lot of people arriving at them daily, requiring a lot of security staff for crowd control, particularly in the mornings. Patients come to the clinic in the morning and get put on a list the same afternoon or soon after, which is very different to the GP to Clinic to Theatre steps in the UK. This means that if you manage to get into a clinic there is no real waiting time, perhaps making it easier for people travelling from further away.

Objective 3

Health related objective: What are the techniques that are being employed by the Plastic Surgery department in China? How does it compare to the UK?

Gowning, gloving and draping techniques are very different. Gowns and drapes are not single use, and for minors you don't even gown, you just glove up, with no scrubbing beforehand. This confused me, particularly at the beginning, and I made sure to stay away from this part of surgery just to make sure I don't cause any trouble. There are also differences in the use of scrub nurses, as a lot of the time surgeons manage their own trolleys, only asking the nurses to bring single pieces of equipment that they need on top of what is there already. Techniques used in surgeries themselves I have to say are very similar. All the plastic surgeons have a biweekly meeting where they discuss different cases and distribute and go through various publications. Discussion and information dissipation ensures that the standards used at the hospital are up there with the rest of the world. Because the techniques are this universal I was able to assist even with surgeons who do not speak English, as a lot of the maneuvers and techniques are identical and to some extent automatic to someone who has an experience in assisting in surgeries, even at a medical student level. Having said all that I have seen a lot of techniques that were completely new to me, such as a double circle breast reduction. Whether this is because I haven't seen that many breast reductions or because this is unusual technique is difficult to tell, however I asked about the inverted T method I've seen before, and apparently it has been abandoned in China due to excessive scarring.

Objective 4

Personal/professional development goals: Observe the differences between Chinese and UK Plastic Surgery department workings and reflect on potential reasons for them.

I was very amused by how the plastic surgery team members related to each other, mostly because it was exactly the same as they do in the UK, despite the wide geographical variation and cultural differences between the countries themselves. There is a clear pecking order and a lot of banter. There were a lot of differences though. The first one to notice was a lab coat. Bare below the elbow policy does not exist in China and every single person wears a long sleeved lab coat. Apart from that I noticed that the respect for privacy is slightly different here, with sometimes multiple people peering into the clinic room, or dressing changes with other patients around. I don't think this comes out of lack of respect, I think its more of a cultural difference. People generally seem to be less self-conscious here and just do their thing without minding other people. Another difference is the time frame. While a typical working day is from 8am to 5pm at the RLH, the reality is that very often surgeons stay till 8pm or even later due to unexpected traumas coming in or surgeries overrunning. In Zhongshan Hospital the working day is from 7 30am to 4 30pm and I've only finished late once, and it was only 2h late on that occasion as well.