

Student Elective Report

Name	Alice Fort-Schaale
Medical School	Hull-York Medical School
Email (optional)	

Country visited	Cuba
City or town	Havana
Hospital/unit/clinic	Hospital Hermanos Ameijeiras - Centro de Postgrado Hospital Clínico Quirúrgico
Dates visited	15 th July – 23 rd August
Supervising doctor	Dra. Caridad Soler
Contact details of your host:	Servicio de Cirugía Plástica y Caumatología San Lázaro 701, Centro Habana. La Habana Cuba 10300

Please give an overview of what you saw / did (200 words max)	<p>The Hospital Hermanos Ameijeiras (HHA) is a public hospital, which also provides private services. HHA is commonly cited as Cuba's flagship hospital and provides most major specialties, except Obstetrics & Gynaecology. I was fortunate to spend the majority of my time in theatre, where I was actively involved in the majority of operations, occasionally alongside internationally renowned surgeons. I also attended ward rounds, out-patient clinic and pre-operative sessions each week. The case-mix was novel (and unexpected) for me, given that the majority of operations were cosmetic and I was intrigued to learn that such procedures are provided under the free Cuban healthcare system. As a result, I was involved in operations spanning a substantial breadth of the cosmetic field, ranging from Rhinoplasty, Rhytidectomy and Otoplasty to Liposuction, Abdominoplasty and Breast procedures – in addition to occasional reconstructive procedures.</p> <p>The experience enabled me to develop in a number of ways; my technical skills and theoretical knowledge were enhanced by daily involvement in surgery and the teaching from this post-graduate training centre. In addition, I gained a valuable insight into the differences and similarities between UK and foreign healthcare systems and the challenges that affect clinicians and the care they can provide.</p>
What were the best things about the visit? (120 words max)	<p>The best thing about my elective was the opportunity to be integrated into the surgical team and involved with types of cases and procedures that I have not encountered before. The experience has certainly confirmed my desire to pursue a career in plastic surgery. I also felt incredibly fortunate to be able to explore this amazing country, which remains largely un-commercialised, whilst meeting</p>

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	<p>individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures.</p> <p>From a personal perspective, the experience was a great challenge of resilience: travelling alone to work in a non-English, resource-poor country. I feel that as a result, I am better equipped to cope with challenges, uncertainties and demands of a surgical career.</p>
<p>What problems did you encounter? (120 words max)</p>	<p>The language was probably the greatest challenge. Although I already had a high level of Spanish, the Cuban accent is often regarded as the most difficult to understand and the vast majority of doctors spoke no English. Nonetheless, this was a welcome challenge, and I have attained a level of near-fluency through practice & private-study, which enabled me to integrate well within the surgical team and to talk to patients.</p> <p>Cuba is also resource-challenged; internet is difficult to obtain, and the US imports embargo remains in place, therefore many aspects of daily living become challenges, as a result, everything from administration (VISAs, withdrawing cash etc.) to buying food and water become complicated and lengthy endeavours – but not impossible.</p>
<p>What accommodation was provided?</p>	<p>Hospital accommodation was available (at a fee), however I opted to stay in alternative accommodation. I actually stayed in a different place each week, so that I would be able to experience different areas of the city. I paid roughly £350 on rent per month, however, there is accommodation available to suit every budget – from hostels, to Casas (the Cuban equivalent of B&Bs), apartments and hotels. I would recommend checking the map to ensure the distance between hospital and accommodation is manageable on foot, or to be well prepared to use transport (buses / colectivos / taxis) which requires a bit of planning or advice from your accommodation host.</p>
<p>Would you recommend this to someone else? (explain if necessary)</p>	<p>Yes, this elective was an amazing experience, with hands-on experience, an interesting case-mix and a helpful and welcoming team. Furthermore, Cuba is a fascinating country, with a wealth of cultural, historical and environmental offerings, which can be explored during free time.</p> <p>I would however recommend that a high level of Spanish is essential (conversational and above). Furthermore, they were not willing to consider any research / audit projects, with the reasoning that 6 weeks was not sufficient time.</p>
<p>Are you more likely to choose a career in plastic surgery as a result of this experience?</p>	<p>Prior to embarking on my elective, I had been sure of my choice to pursue a career in plastic surgery. This experience has both confirmed my desire and fuelled my motivation to establish a career in this field.</p>