

Student Elective Report

Name	Eleanor Lumley
Medical School	University of Aberdeen
Email (optional)	

Country visited	South Korea (1), India (2)
City or town	Seoul (1), Coimbatore (2)
Hospital/unit/clinic	Asan Medical Center (AMC), Lower limb, trunk & microsurgery unit of plastic surgery department (1), Ganga Hospital, Plastic surgery department (2)
Dates visited	7/1/19 – 1/2/19 (1), 4/2/19 – 1/3/19 (2)
Supervising doctor	JP Hong (1), SR Sabapathy (2)
Host contact details:	

Please give an overview of what you saw / did (200 words max)	<p>(1) Asan Medical Center is one of the leading government hospitals in South Korea. The plastic surgery department is comprised of 3 subunits, A team (lower limb, trunk & microsurgery), B team (breast) and C team (craniofacial and cleft). I was in the A team for 1 month, where I had the opportunity to spend most of my time observing reconstructive cases in theatre (every day), attending outpatient clinics, take part in the weekly microsurgery meetings (all in English), taking part and presenting in plastic surgery journal club and undertaking clinical research in lower extremity reconstruction. I saw a high volume of complex lower extremity reconstructions, predominantly with free flaps, truncal reconstructions and many lower (some upper) extremity lymphaticovenous anastomosis (LVA) cases (paediatric and adult). I was also able to observe a number of complex craniofacial and cleft palate cases, a subspeciality not available at my hospital that I had never seen before. I managed to scrub for a few cases, most notably being invited to assist by my professor in a 3-level lower limb LVA case, my first microsurgical case, where I was the first assistant for the professor and the fellow.</p> <p>(2) Ganga hospital, in contrast, is a private, specialist plastics and orthopaedic hospital renowned for trauma and upper and lower extremity reconstruction. They currently have 9 dedicated plastics theatres, which they are currently expanding, creating a total of 15 plastics theatres with a dedicated microsurgical ICU attached, which, once completed, will make it the second largest microsurgery unit in the world, after Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taiwan. I attended the morning seminars daily with all trainees and visitors, where consultants gave talks on various reconstructive and plastic surgery topics and every second day we had summaries of trauma cases from on-call duties. In an average overnight on-call you can easily expect multiple severe limb injuries from RTAs, ring avulsions, crush or run-over injuries. We had clinics 3 mornings a week (all run in English) and theatres ran everyday Monday – Saturday (Sunday is only day off). Most of the operative workload is complex trauma, acute and secondary procedures for trauma reconstructions. They receive large volumes of patients from other states and other countries. There is a high volume of brachial plexus cases, both adults and children, traumatic and birth palsy cases. These patients require multiple stages of surgery to regain function, depending on level and extent of injury.</p>
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<p>What were the best things about the visit? (120 words max)</p>	<p>(1) I loved the open, honest and comfortable atmosphere Professors Hong and Suh created for learning in the team. They encouraged all trainees and visitors to be curious and ask (intelligent) questions in theatre and asked what other options could be used for reconstruction and why during our weekly microsurgery meetings. It proved to be a fantastic and fruitful environment for pushing trainees to think and question more, grow as surgeons and academic work to flourish. Additionally, I learnt a lot about management of complex lower limb reconstruction and lymphoedema cases. They exemplified the perfect balance of work hard; play hard, showing all visitors Korean hospitality at many team and departmental dinners.</p> <p>(2) I relished in the high volume diverse trauma presentations that arrived in steady streams to the department. I had the opportunity to see some operations I had only ever read about – finger replantations, toe to thumb transfers, traumatic severe upper limb amputations (a case that was salvaged – arm was only still attached by the brachial artery!), nerve transfers for brachial plexus surgery. – to name a few! In my first week in Coimbatore I undertook the weeklong Ganga microsurgery course, which was amazing – I performed venous, arterial end-to-end and end-to-side and vein grafts during the week on femoral vessels of our anaesthetised rats. It was fantastic to be able to learn so much from all the residents and fellows – from all over India, with visitors from India, Europe, USA and Africa, a mixture of plastics and orthopaedic training backgrounds. The buzz of the on-call nights I did were incomparable, definitely one of my favourite things I did at Ganga.</p>
<p>What problems did you encounter? (120 words max)</p>	<p>The common issue in both departments was the number of trainees. Each consultant had 1-2 of their own trainees plus a fellow usually for operating. It wasn't unusual to have 5+ visiting trainees/fellows, all of who were supernumerary in theatre, so scrubbing opportunities were very limited. When there was very big/complex cases sometimes they would need extra hands – but as the medical student amongst all final year trainees/fellows, I was at the bottom of the line to help. I've had a great deal of hands on experience at my own unit over the past 3 years, so this wasn't a particular issue for me, I gained just as much observing the multitude of interesting, complex procedures.</p> <p>Outpatient clinics in Seoul were all conducted in Korean. If it was particularly busy (which it usually is, ~60-70 patients/clinic) then there was limited time to translate and explain in English.</p>
<p>What accommodation was provided?</p>	<p>(1) In Seoul, AMC only provides dormitories for visiting doctors, not available to visiting medical students unfortunately. There was a document with recommendations for visitors provided in the induction pack (standard for any visitors), which suggested a number of local hotels (3-5*) and short-term apartment rentals, all out of my budget as a student. Seoul is also incredibly expensive to rent accommodation, short term apartment leases or Airbnb (average per month ~£1300-1500). I was lucky enough to find a fantastic Airbnb room a short subway ride away/15mins by taxi north of the river from the hospital for about £640/month.</p> <p>(2) Accommodation was provided by Ganga in the form of a flat share with one of the female residents/registrars working in the plastic surgery department there. I had my own room (lockable with key) and shared living area with basic kitchen, washing facilities and aircon (in bedroom only). It was very convenient, a 5 min drive/20 min walk to the hospital (roadside, no footpaths) with lots of local amenities a short walking distance away. It was very reasonable around \$400/month. Most other visitors stayed in a new modern hotel, 2 mins walk to the hospital, which I believe was ~\$500-600/month.</p>
<p>Would you recommend this to someone else? (explain if necessary)</p>	<p>Yes! I am maybe more focused on what I want to do in plastics than the average medical student, so my experience was fairly specialised even as far as plastic surgery electives go. There are more generalised plastic surgery units out there, which may be more suited to students initially exploring plastics as a career on elective.</p>

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	<p>Ganga offers great experience in extremity trauma, microsurgery and congenital upper extremity – a lot of pretty specialised work, which is great if that is what you are interested in. Great opportunity to combine with microsurgery course, which isn't cheap, but recommend if you already have well developed surgical skills and confidence. Coimbatore is well placed for exploring Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala for travelling around South India.</p> <p>I would suggest AMC in Seoul to be good to experience all subunits in plastic surgery department if you are looking for a more broad experience of plastics, still fairly specialised, complex cases they operate on. Seoul is a massive city, you can do/see a lot there alone, but there's ample opportunity to travel throughout Korea's mountainous landscape, lots of hiking trails and winter sports, if you go in winter (Pyeongchang is ~2hrs NE of Seoul, where Winter Olympics was held recently). Thoroughly recommend both units as incredibly friendly, educational, academic and complex variety of surgical cases!</p>
Are you more likely to choose a career in plastic surgery as a result of this experience?	<p>Definitely! I've wanted to be a plastic reconstructive surgeon since being introduced to the speciality 3 years ago. This has further driven my desire to also work in academic plastic surgery, become a global plastic reconstructive surgeon, the implicit value of teaching and learning from global peers and the value of having academic and surgical mentors, all of which I have found during my elective. This experience has further encouraged me to pursue trauma and lower/upper extremity reconstructive surgery, very rewarding subspecialities. I can't wait to encourage more students, of all genders, from all backgrounds, when I become an FY1 this year to consider plastic surgery as a career too.</p>