

Student Elective Report

Name	Toni Huw Mihailidis
Medical School	University of Bristol Medical School
Email (optional)	

Country visited	South Africa
City or town	Cape Town
Hospital/unit/clinic	Tygerberg Academic Hospital
Dates visited	01/04/2019 – 24/05/2019
Supervising doctor	Professor Sammy Al-Benna and Dr Alexander Zühlke
Contact details of your host:	Professor Sammy Al-Benna, Head of the Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

Please give an overview of what you saw / did (200 words max)	<p>This was a clinical elective in the Division of Plastic, Reconstructive, and Aesthetic Surgery at Tygerberg Academic Hospital. As such, I was attached to the Plastic Surgery firm and attended theatres, clinics, and on-call commitments. Typically, this meant 4-5 theatres sessions, 3 clinic sessions, and 1 on-call session per week. Additionally, I was fortunate enough to be able to cultivate my academic interests and work towards a paper whilst there. Overall, this was a wonderful and, for me, as someone with little exposure to Plastic Surgery at undergraduate level, a much-needed opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of Plastic Surgery as a discipline and as a career. Undertaking this opportunity in a less well-resourced environment which is different to that of my own was an insightful and enriching experience.</p> <p>All of the above of course is in addition to the wonderful pastimes that Cape Town provided during weekends, from breath-taking hikes, early morning surfs, and the Guinness World Record largest commercial bungee jump in the world!</p>
What were the best things about the visit? (120 words max)	<p>The most important was being part of an amazing, friendly, and eager-to-teach team. I was able to scrub up and assist in the vast majority of cases and, towards the end of my 8-weeks and once appropriately trained, was able to perform minor, day-case procedures e.g. excision of sebaceous cyst, independently under direct senior supervision. Thus, through daily immersion, I was able to drastically improve my theatre etiquette, confidence, and, most importantly, my skills. Whilst I learned a great deal about the 'bread and butter' of a Plastic Surgeon's workload, I was also able to scrub up on rarer cases sponsored by The Smile Foundation and to see pathology that I might not otherwise have seen throughout my career, such as a particularly large ameloblastoma.</p>

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	<p>Finally, as mentioned above, Cape Town is an incredible place with an endless list of activities, with something for everyone, from picturesque wine farms, world-famous surf beaches, safaris, hiking and so forth.</p>
<p>What problems did you encounter? (120 words max)</p>	<p>Most patients I encountered had at least some command of English. However, during clinics, residents of more rural areas were from communities where English was not spoken. Thinking creatively to communicate with patients, e.g. drawings, and overcoming the language barrier was sometimes difficult to ensure they received the best treatment but was a challenge equally to embrace. This was also an opportunity to learn and gain insight into indigenous languages, such as Xhosa, which have fascinating histories.</p> <p>Secondly, South Africa contains over 21% of the world's HIV population and one must be comfortable with working in such an environment in a surgical discipline. It is important to double-glove, wear protective eye equipment (provided at theatres there) and be aware of the hospital's policy in case of the need of post-exposure anti-retroviral treatment.</p> <p>Finally, it is no secret that personal safety is an issue in South Africa and, particularly at night time, it's important to only ever venture in groups and to know where is safe and where is not. Provided that one is sensible, this shouldn't disturb your stay but it is important to always be wary of this whilst there and take appropriate precaution.</p>
<p>What accommodation was provided?</p>	<p>Accommodation was provided on-site by Stellenbosch University, Tygerberg Campus. Rooms are either single or double, and are part of a shared flat. There is a shared kitchen and bathroom. The rooms contain a desk, a bed, and a wardrobe, as well as a safe for important belongings. The accommodation was comfortable, modern, and more than adequate. Friendly staff clean the accommodation on a daily basis and, for a small fee, personal laundry is done on-site. A gym, student canteen, library and small shop are all on campus, adjacent to the hospital.</p>
<p>Would you recommend this to someone else? (explain if necessary)</p>	<p>Overall, I had an incredible experience in South Africa and, for all of the aforementioned reasons, I would without a doubt recommend this elective to anyone considering a Plastic Surgery elective.</p>
<p>Are you more likely to choose a career in plastic surgery as a result of this experience?</p>	<p>Absolutely. Attending this elective was a huge determinant in helping me to discover whether Plastic Surgery is a career I would pursue. I am pleased to say that, having had the opportunity to immerse myself in the broad range of Plastic Surgery subspecialities, and owing to its creative, artistic, and anatomically diverse nature, and the difference it imparts to the quality of life of its patients, that Plastic Surgery is indeed the career choice for me.</p>