

My elective in Nepal was very enjoyable and educational. I spent time in the plastic surgery department at Kirtipur hospital, Kathmandu and also at Lalgadh leprosy hospital. Both placements were different and complemented each other giving a very varied clinical experience overall.

Kirtipur hospital specialised in burns care and cleft lip & palate surgery. Burn contracture surgeries and cleft surgeries were new to me and it was interesting to learn the surgical principles. Everyone was very willing to teach and keen to encourage active participation. Under excellent supervision, I improved basic surgical skills such as suturing and scalpel handling, and more advanced skills like harvesting skin grafts. My clinical exposure was not limited to these subspecialties though as many patients with extensive hand trauma, complex wounds and many other conditions were also routinely managed here. New innovative techniques such as LPRF were being trialled here. I observed and assisted with multiple free flap surgeries such as a free fibula bone flap transfer to cover an extensive thumb defect caused by a road traffic accident. Many of the operations which were carried out here were truly lifechanging for the patients and impacted greatly on their ability to function.

Aside from time in the operating theatre, each day started with an MDT discussion of new admissions, operating list cases and post-op cases. These cases were used as the basis for teaching clinical reasoning and for choosing surgical approaches, as well as to highlight difficulties that might be encountered. After this, a more formal teaching session was scheduled each day ranging from presentations on different plastic surgery subspecialties to literature reviews to audits. I was asked to give a series of presentations (supported by the St Andrews Centre) about my previous burns placement, the set-up of UK burns care and methods used there to improve outcomes. It allowed me to delve into the theory and look at the physiological principles underlying the burns surgery that I had seen at home. It was very interesting to compare burns care especially considering the limited resources and challenging patient population.

In contrast, Lalgadh leprosy hospital gave me a more holistic view of patient care. This hospital specialised in all facets of leprosy care, however also provided dermatology and limited general medical services to the local district.

Typically, there are many reconstructive surgeries happening, however sadly the responsible surgeon was away during my time there. Instead, I got involved with complex wound care, debridement and digit amputations. I got so much exposure to a large volume and variety of complex wound cases where each case was different and was managed in a tailored way. This has been invaluable in helping me to understand management decisions for different wounds and will stand me in good stead for the future.

Aside from surgery, I spent time in dermatology and leprosy clinics, managing patients on the wards and observing physiotherapy sessions. I gained an understanding about how footwear and prosthetics were made and individualised for the patients. I saw how the self-care community programs provided practical lessons to minimise chance of readmission as well as providing a crucial support network.

In the community, I was privileged to observe governmental dermatology clinics and to take part in the hospital's program working with very poor rural schools who had no access to healthcare. Public health advice was given about simple things like how to use the donated toothbrush and toothpaste to clean their teeth. We also ran a clinic there to monitor growth of the students and to treat any health conditions.

The combination of these placements gave me a better understanding of clinical reasoning and decision-making behind surgical approaches as well as how surgery fits into the holistic care of a patient. I learnt much that will be important for my future career.

Aside from my clinical experiences, I learnt much about Nepalese culture and met amazingly kind and welcoming people there who really made me feel at home. After my placements, I saw some of Nepal's breath-taking scenery too. I did some trekking between the snow-capped mountains of the Everest mountain range and ended my elective relaxing next to Pokhara lake. This was a perfect end to a perfect elective.