

## Harry Carter Elective 2018 Summary

I started my elective in the regional plastics, maxillofacial and burns unit of the Hutt Hospital just outside of Wellington, New Zealand. Here, I became part of a team of 20 doctors working in the plastics department and taking part in a wide range of procedures and clinics. I saw and helped to treat a range of skin cancers, developing my confidence in the recognition of benign and malignant lesions. I would often assist in larger cases too, including traumatic reconstructions using free flaps, care and treatment severe burns victims and head and neck cancer surgery. There were also specialist MDT clinics to attend for problems such as hand trauma, malignant melanoma and vascular birthmarks. The best thing about my placement in Wellington was being involved in big cases that I had limited exposure to in the UK. Each day was completely different because the team was so diverse. I now have a much better appreciation for the variety of plastic surgery procedures that are possible. Outside of my time on placement, I had a fantastic time travelling around New Zealand, enjoying skiing, surfing, hiking, skydiving and rafting to name a few activities. The locals I met were very friendly and generous, helping me to make the most out of my time there.

Following New Zealand, I travelled to a small village in the central state of India called Padhar. This village is home to a ~200 bed Christian mission hospital that provides medical, surgical, obstetric and emergency services. My first day at the hospital was quite a culture shock; patients were seen next to each other in outpatients, hygiene standards were lower and most surgical equipment was reusable. Surprisingly, the busiest surgeon was the maxillofacial surgeon, followed by the plastic surgeon, dealing with large volumes of head and neck cancer patients due to tobacco chewing. Poverty in the population meant that healthcare was a luxury and patients would often present extremely late. My best memories from Padhar were being much more involved in surgery, often working as a first assistant and closing wounds. The doctors in the hospital were fantastic teachers and very hospitable, often inviting us for dinners and larger events. While we were there, a group of German doctors visited to put on a 'Smile Train' camp, correcting tens of cleft lip and palates for young patients from all over northern India. It was great to see the positive impact this camp has had on the community through clearing a backlog of thousands of untreated patients and educating local surgeons in performing the correction procedure. The risks of visiting rural India are significant. Roads are very unsafe and infectious disease is common. Regular hand hygiene in and outside of the hospital is worthwhile and taking steps to minimise the risk of catching TB, hepatitis, typhus etc. is important.

I would recommend Plastics in Hutt Hospital as they receive major cases from all around the North Island and are one of the few centres where plastic surgeons dominate head and neck surgery. The team there are very friendly and keen to teach. If you want lots of hands-on surgical experience, Padhar is a great place to visit. Head and neck cancers are rife, meaning assisting in lots of neck dissections, excisions and reconstructions using flaps. You will also see lots of interesting medical cases that would not present in the UK. As the village is quite at weekends, it is worth trying to visit some of the larger cities by train if you get the chance.