

Student Elective Report

Name	Joshua Michaels
Medical School	Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry
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Country visited	Cuba
City or town	Santiago de Cuba
Hospital/unit/clinic	Hospital General Dr. Juan Bruno Zayas Alfonso, Surgical Department
Dates visited	17/04/17 – 09/06/17
Supervising doctor	Dr. Jose Suarez Lorenzo
Contact details of your host:	suarez@seirra.scu.sdl.cu

Please give an overview of what you saw / did (200 words max)	<p>As a medical student in this hospital, a lot of my time was spent observing the surgical teams in the treatment of patients in both an acute and elective setting. Although the language barrier at times made it difficult to volunteer myself to be more involved in procedures, as I gained confidence, I soon found myself performing small minor operations including the resection and biopsy of innocuous and sometimes more sinister skin lesions. These day case procedures were fairly routine and common practice amongst surgeons, particular those working in plastics.</p> <p>Whilst this gave me some exposure to plastic surgery, the vast majority of major procedures were not performed by the plastics team. Nonetheless, I was able to scrub in and assist in both partial and complete thyroidectomies, elective hysterectomies and observe a team of surgeons perform life-saving bowel surgery in patients with inflammatory bowel disease.</p> <p>My time away from theatres was spent appreciating and discussing the pre-operative assessment for elective patients and caring for post-operative patients with complications.</p>
What were the best things about the visit? (120 words max)	<p>Certainly one of the most rewarding highlights of my elective was to be given the opportunity to develop my basic surgical skills. Although there are very different protocols regarding infection control, scrubbing requirements and suturing techniques, it was a refreshing exposure to some of the differences between healthcare in Cuba and the United Kingdom. What was also a rewarding opportunity was my ability to attend a variety of different surgical procedures and considering the late difficult I had in gaining exposure to plastic surgery in particular, my</p>

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	appreciation of surgical as a broad specialty definitely flourished.
What problems did you encounter? (120 words max)	As mentioned above, I was told late on in my elective plans that spending the full amount of time in the plastics department was not possible. This was certainly not what I had planned and I spent a great deal of time trying to find ways of getting around this obvious stumbling block. However, with this in mind, I was still able to work amongst teams that regularly liaised with the plastics department and this gave me a novel appreciation of the specialty from a distance.
What accommodation was provided?	Contact details for local people providing rental accommodation was given by the hospital's elective programme coordinator.
Would you recommend this to someone else? (explain if necessary)	<p>For exposure to a novel and greatly successful healthcare system, Cuba is a fantastic place to travel to on an elective. Thought this is the case, it is essential to speak Spanish to a moderate/advanced conversational level.</p> <p>Bear in mind however that the programme is very disorganised and it is entirely possible that the specialty you aim to work in could be switched last minute to a completely different one.</p> <p>Nonetheless, I had a fantastic time and would certainly recommend gaining experience in a country with such a rich and vibrant culture.</p>
Are you more likely to choose a career in plastic surgery as a result of this experience?	I have been keen on working in plastic surgery for a while now, and although my exposure to the direct specialty was somewhat limited, being able to work amongst teams that regularly liaised with the plastics department allowed to appreciate the broad range of specialties that plastic surgery encounters. This very much fits in with the type of work that I'd like to be involved in later on in my career. And so for this reason, yes, my elective in Cuba has strengthened my desire to pursue a career in plastic surgery