

Student Elective Report

Name	Maria Nowicka
Medical School	University of Nottingham
Email (optional)	

Country visited	Vietnam
City or town	Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)
Hospital/unit/clinic	Cho Ray Hospital
Dates visited	24.04.18 – 02.06.17
Supervising doctor	Dr Nguyen Ngoc Bich
Contact details of your host:	ngocbich1958@gmail.com

Please give an overview of what you saw / did (200 words max)	<p>The plastic surgery department in Cho Ray hospital consisted of crowded wards, 2 theatres, and a burn ICU. I spent the vast majority of my 6 weeks there alternating between the two operating rooms; one of them focused on burns, while the other on reconstructive surgery. Nearly every case was incredibly complex, with severity that is rarely encountered in Western countries. Life-threatening burns are an everyday occurrence in Vietnam for two main reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very few health and safety regulations in the workplace combined with a lack of safety education lead to numerous electric burns. - The main mode of transportation in Vietnam is the motorbike; RTAs and DIY repairs result in severe gasoline burns. <p>Other common modes of injuries include self-incineration and assault.</p> <p>The bulk of the cases in the reconstructive theatre consisted of old burn contractures and keloid scars, the likes of which are virtually non-existent in developed countries. There were also many pressure ulcers, skin cancer excisions, and even a few of the more sophisticated forehead flaps.</p> <p>I spent a lot of my time observing in theatre, however most days I was scrubbed in at the table. With time, I was allowed progressively more involvement. By the end of my placement, under careful supervision, I was allowed to suture, obtain skin grafts with the Watson blade, apply grafts, and debride tissue.</p>
What were the best things about the visit? (120 words max)	<p>The staff in my department were lovely and very eager to involve me in theatre; I was truly made to feel that I was part of the team. It has also been an extremely valuable experience to see such an immense quantity of severe burns, and compare their management to the one I'm</p>

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	<p>familiar with in the UK. The cases in the reconstructive theatre were very unique to developing countries, where education and access to healthcare is poor. It is possible that I may never see anything like that back in the UK.</p> <p>Vietnam is a fascinating country, with a vivid culture and history. The people are proud and welcoming, and it has been amazing to immerse myself in this foreign world. Everything is affordable and the 6 weeks there didn't stretch my limited budget. Not to mention the food is absolutely astonishing!</p>
<p>What problems did you encounter? (120 words max)</p>	<p>The language barrier was at times prominent – only about a third of the surgeons spoke good English. Even then, the language skills tended to be limited to conversational English; it was therefore very difficult to grasp a detailed management plan or enquire about the exact pathophysiological process. I would strongly recommend bringing a good surgical textbook to supplement your learning! Despite this problem, all the staff still made a great effort to answer any of my questions and I was always grateful for their attempts.</p>
<p>What accommodation was provided?</p>	<p>The hospital didn't provide accommodation – I rented out an apartment via AirBnB with my friend, which we were very happy with. There were plenty around the hospital, which was what we opted for, as the city centre is around a 15-20 minute drive (whereas we had a 15 minute walk!). Whatever option you choose, the public transportation costs next to nothing and is fairly straightforward to use. Taxis are very cheap as well and I recommend using Uber!</p>
<p>Would you recommend this to someone else? (explain if necessary)</p>	<p>I would strongly recommend this elective to anyone eager to experience healthcare in a completely different setting and looking to do a hands-on placement. It was incredible to see how specialised healthcare functions under a different political system, as well as the way in which the management of patients is limited by resources and the availability of sophisticated equipment.</p> <p>Ho Chi Minh is a huge, vibrant city, full of life and activities; it was an amazing destination and I would urge anyone to visit!</p>
<p>Are you more likely to choose a career in plastic surgery as a result of this experience?</p>	<p>I am definitely more likely to choose a plastic surgery career following this experience. Spending 6 weeks on the plastic surgery unit reassured me that I wish to dedicate myself to this specialty and burns in particular.</p> <p>Thank you BAPRAS for helping me fund my elective!</p>