

Elective report: Vancouver Childrens Hospital

I organised my 4 week senior elective in Canada, Vancouver- British Columbia Children's Hospital (BCCH) within the department of Paediatric Haematology/ Oncology. I arrived on my first day at 8am and I was given my pager and brought straight to the ward where they were mid handover, receiving updates from the overnight staff. At first I was I was overwhelmed by the numerous specific abbreviations which I was unfamiliar with and apprehensive about the level of responsibility I was going to have but the team soon put me at ease. They were very friendly and inclusive and spent time to explain things to me and encouraged me to ask questions when I did not understand. I was quickly made part of the team and on my first morning I was given my first patient to follow who was a 3 year old boy with trisomy 21 and high risk Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL). Over the next couple of days/ weeks I was given additional patients to follow including a 4 year old girl with a Choroid Plexus Carcinoma, a 17 year old girl with a right distal femur Rhabdomyosarcoma and a 7 year old boy with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia.

My typical day started at 8am with a handover from the night staff or a morning teaching session. The remaining time until 10.15am would be spent following up on each of my patients care; bloods, vitals chart, fluid balance and nutrition. I would take note of their daily medication and chemotherapy regimens and record these in their written notes. I went to examine my patients at least once daily and would chat with them and their guardians to identifying any symptoms/side effects/issues they were experiencing that that. At 10.15am daily, we had a ward round at which an Attending (consultant), a fellow (Specialty Reg), 2-4 residents (FY1,FY2), charge nurse and a pharmacist attended. I would present each of my patients formally and flag up any areas of concern which helped to formulate a plan for the day. I was able to write orders for medications to be changed, bloods to be taken and transfusions of blood products to be given as long as they were countersigned by a resident who I was supervising me. In Vancouver the bloods are all done by the nurses on the ward, so I did not gain any further experience of this during my elective.

This placement was very challenging from an emotional perspective. Some families had been aware of their child's diagnosis for over a year before I met them and were extremely knowledgeable about the specific chemotherapy regimes and side effects and often asked specific questions which required an in depth knowledge to answer. In contrast to this, I met families who had gone from having a perfectly healthy child one day to a child with a potentially terminal illness, requiring intensive chemotherapy. Despite detailed conversations with Consultants regarding side effects, they were never prepared for the reality of the physical deterioration which chemotherapy caused their children. I found it difficult to watch parents suffering so much while trying to keep a smile on their face in front of their children.

Educational experience:

During my time at BBCH I was aware of patients with various rare pathologies such as ALL, AML, choroid plexus carcinoma, rhabdomyosarcoma, retinoblastoma, Ewings sarcoma, neuroblastoma, Wilms tumour, germ cell tumour, febrile neutropenia. I attended weekly educational meetings such as chart rounds, radiology rounds, tumour board conferences, and morbidity and mortality meetings. These were interesting to be present for as individual patient cases would be presented and discussed by the specialist MDT involved, including; pathologists, oncologists, haematologists, surgeons and radiologists in order to ensure the most appropriate treatment was provided in the best interest for the patients. There were small group teaching sessions which were organised for students, residents and fellows which covered a range of topics including oncological emergencies, von willibrands disease, haemophilia, rhabdomyosarcoma, brain tumours, neuroblastoma and Leukaemia's. Haematopathology rounds also occurred weekly, with haematopathologists presenting some interesting cases and questioning the students and residents on various blood films and clinical presentations..

Travel/ Vancouver life style:

I really enjoyed living in Vancouver, it is a vibrant city with so much to offer. The city is very accessible by bicycle which I was very lucky to have included in my accommodation. I cycled to work every day and spent my weekends and evenings exploring the city and surrounding areas, hiking, paddle-boarding, doing yoga and eating! I spent 5 days before my elective touring around the Rockies visiting Jasper, Lake Louise and Banff which had some breathtaking scenery. Following

my elective I spent a week travelling around Vancouver Island surfing in Tofino and visiting a family friend on Texada Island.

All in all, I had an amazing experience in Vancouver and would like to thank the Scottish Haematological Society for providing me with a student elective bursary which helped me fund my elective this summer.