

From Melbourne to Bloomsbury

Having enjoyed my undergraduate neuroscience lectures and clinical neurology placement I decided to use my elective period to gain further insight into a career in this field. I organised two neurology placements, each lasting four weeks; the first at St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, Australia, and the second at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery (NHNN), Queen Square, London.

Australia is somewhere I have always wanted to visit and appealed to me as an elective destination as it is English speaking, not somewhere I'd be likely to catch a horrible diarrhoeal infection, and there is plenty to do; everything from scuba diving on the Great Barrier Reef to watching the sunrise at Uluru. As a general rule, Australia gets booked up for electives about a year in advance, so it can be difficult to get a place doing the specialty of your choice. It is also necessary to apply for a visa from the Australia High Commission and insurance cover with the Medical Indemnity Protection Society (MIPS). I wanted to spend my second placement at the NHNN because it a world famous pioneering hospital. Students are advised to organise electives here 18 months in advance as it is a very popular centre and there are limited spaces for visiting undergraduates.

St Vincent's is a large tertiary referral centre and home to one of the four Clinical Schools at the University of Melbourne. There are fifteen consultants in the neurology department who rotate through looking after inpatients, spending the rest of their time doing research and 'consults' (clinics). There are two registrars and one resident (equivalent to a FY2 doctor), with whom I attended morning ward rounds. We usually had between six and ten inpatients, split between the neurology ward and the 'MediHotel'. The 'MediHotel' caters for patients who are not acutely unwell, but need several investigations, all of which are booked for the same week. The nursing care is minimal and patients are responsible for taking their own medications. This system worked really well as given the vastness of the country some people in Australia have to travel for several hours to reach a specialist centre. My responsibilities included clerking new admissions, taking bloods and performing supervised lumbar punctures; very useful experience. I also attended general public clinics and various private specialist clinics, including epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, movement disorders, headaches and

neuropsychiatry. I was surprised one day when a lady came in with a small dog which growled viciously if either myself or the doctor tried to examine her. Apparently it is not unheard of for patients to turn up with animals, I was told that one lady attended with a joey that she was fostering! The staff were all very friendly, I enjoyed the laid back 'no worries' Aussie attitude and learning some of the Australian colloquialisms.

The NHNN is a teaching hospital in the University College London Hospital Trust and is closely linked with the Institute of Neurology (ION), a leading neurological research institute. I was attached to the movement disorders firm under the supervision of Professor Lees. My responsibilities included clerking in patients arriving as elective admissions at the beginning of the week, and presenting them on the weekly ward round. This was challenging as some patients were being investigated for, or had been diagnosed with, conditions I had not even heard of! Over the weeks I saw patients with fragile X tremor ataxia syndrome, orthostatic tremor, corticobasal degeneration, myoclonus, dystonia, and the more familiar Parkinson's Disease. I also tried to see patients on other firms, and clerked people with multiple sclerosis, peripheral neuropathies, and epilepsy. In addition I arranged to spend some time in theatres and was able to observe a variety of operations including microvascular decompression for trigeminal neuralgia, deep brain stimulation surgery for Parkinson's Disease, and an awake craniotomy with cortical stimulation and tumour resection. It was a most surreal experience talking to patients during the awake procedures. There were many clinics to attend and the clinical teaching was excellent, despite my placement being in the summer months when there are fewer sessions organised.

My elective has enabled me to visit a new part of the world and experience working in both a different health care system and a specialist neurology centre. I have improved my history taking and examination skills and seen lots of interesting cases. It has been thoroughly enjoyable and I would recommend it to anyone thinking of doing something similar.

Many thanks to St John's College, Cambridge, for their generous grant from the Rollerston Fund, without which I would not have been able to undertake these placements.



Catherine Slattery is a final year medical student at St John's College, University of Cambridge.

Correspondence to:
E. cfs25@cam.ac.uk

BrainVision UK Ltd was established in 2004. We are a distribution company dedicated to the provision of technical and software solutions to universities and hospitals in the UK and Ireland. We represent specialist manufacturers from around the world to offer novel and unique product lines for Neurophysiological and psychophysiological research and clinical applications.

The home in the UK and Ireland for
BrainAmp MR Series
Medoc Stimulators
Supplies and consumables



For more information please contact:-
Brain Vision (UK) Ltd
Suite 4, Zeal House
8 Deer Park Rd.
London SW19 3GY



020 8543 0022
www.brainvision.co.uk