

My Neurosurgery Elective in Cape Town – Ololade Tijani

My elective was one of my most anticipated experiences of medical school as I knew it would be pivotal in many ways; allowing me to experience healthcare in a different setting and enabling me to access opportunities I could not access in medical school. I therefore felt really blessed and grateful for the opportunity to undertake a neurosurgery elective at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa which was a truly remarkable experience.



Having sought opportunities to gain exposure to neurosurgery in the UK during my holidays and in my intercalated year, I wanted further exposure to gain a more holistic appreciation of what neurosurgery entails within different systems and across different settings including clinics and high dependency/intensive care units which I got exposure to.

As an aspiring neurosurgeon, I wanted to increase my knowledge of neuroanatomy, neurosurgical pathologies and increase my confidence in the assessment of neurosurgical patients and the team definitely supported me with this, signposting me to useful resources and where possible, teaching during ward round, theatre or clinic settings. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to join some of the Friday teaching sessions for the neurosurgical trainees in the neuroscience institute which was very dynamic and informative. One of the sessions included hands-on experience on cadaveric specimens using the microscope; an experience I really enjoyed. Another session involved the ENT team and neurosurgery team simulating a transorbital approach for skull base tumours, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of neurosurgery. The multidisciplinary nature of neurosurgery was further emphasised by weekly rounds with the occupational therapy team, social worker input and the nursing team working synergistically to deliver quality care to patients.

Being in Cape Town provided me with exposure to pathology that I had not encountered in the UK and I enjoyed the opportunities to scrub in for the operations, providing me with elements of hands-on experience which I really looked forward to. During this elective, I also spent two weeks with the neurology team where I learnt how to do a lumbar puncture and got the opportunity to do this on a patient. Additionally, this elective gave me a greater appreciation of global health and the interplay between public health and neurosurgery. I also witnessed aspects of global determinants of health influencing patient's health journeys. I gained further appreciation of this from attending ShawCo Clinics; a student-led non-profit organisation committed to providing quality healthcare to less privileged communities in Cape Town which was very helpful for developing autonomy (albeit still accountable to seniors) while serving those in need and teaching younger medical students – a society I highly recommend to all students undertaking an elective in Groote Schuur Hospital.

Overall, I was very enthralled by the breadth of knowledge of the neurosurgical team, I learnt a lot from the daily morning meetings about the importance of knowledge and clinical reasoning in making appropriate referrals whilst gaining exposure to neuroradiology through the discussion of patient scans. This elective further ignited my passion for pursuing a career in neurosurgery and provided invaluable lessons in preparing me for my clinical practice.

I am very grateful to the team at Groote Schuur for their incredible support and the University of Cape Town team who supported me with my application, Leicester Medical School for their support in allowing me to undertake this elective and providing funding support through the Turing Scheme and the SBNS for the opportunity to apply for the Elective Bursary which was tremendously helpful.