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Renal Association Elective Bursary Report

This summer I undertook a nephrology elective in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA under the supervision of Dr Matthew Sanger, a practicing interventional nephrologist affiliated with Ochsner Medical Center. The center I worked in was a private practice specializing in interventional nephrology and vascular surgery with an emphasis on hemodialysis vascular access. My main reason for undertaking a placement in interventional nephrology in the United States of America was to further my understanding of an area of medicine that I found particularly interesting whilst being able to compare and evaluate the services offered by two contrasting systems of medical care, the USA and the UK. The practice with which I conducted my placement specialised in preventative medicine and I was very interested to see the lessons that could be learnt and whether there were any techniques or systems which could be employed in the NHS. Professionally, I hoped to develop and deepen my knowledge of a fascinating area of medicine and to determine whether or not this was a specialism that I might like to pursue. There is a lot of scope for further specialism within renal medicine and I hoped to establish if there was a particular field, such as surgery, that appealed as a vocation. The concept of interventional nephrology was one that was foreign to me and I was eager to learn more about what it entailed and how it differed to other renal specialities.

By the end of my attachment I felt I had learnt a lot about interventional nephrology but not as much about renal medicine as I was expecting. I was expected to see patients in the center each weekday and participate in their medical care and surgeries. I enjoyed this aspect of the rotation as I was able to find out about the patients we were to be operating on which made the procedures more interesting to me. The patients I was seeing were all of a particular type: end stage renal failure and on dialysis. If I were to do my rotation again, I would try to find a way to see a wider variety of patients with varying health problems rather than the fairly similar ones that arrive at the Vascular Access Center.

Most patients had an endovascular surgery performed on the same day as their office visit. This was the aspect of the elective I liked the most. It was a very 'hands on' rotation where I assumed as much responsibility as I was capable of handling. I started tentatively but felt more at ease as the elective progressed. I learnt a lot about how I adapt to practical procedures and in particular, how it takes me a number of attempts at a certain skill before I start to feel confident in doing it. I took a very active role in a lot of the procedures and felt like I improved a lot of my practical skills, including suturing, cannulation and suture ties that will help me in my future career as a doctor. By being so actively involved, my confidence levels increased and it taught me to try to get as much experience as possible in the more practical elements of medicine.

Discussion:

Overall, I enjoyed my time at the Vascular Access Center of New Orleans and am very grateful to Dr Sanger and all the staff for being so welcoming and also for giving me the opportunity to work and learn at the Center. Although the patients we saw had very specific problems, I really learnt a lot about interventional nephrology and vascular medicine. I also feel that I gained a basic understanding of differences in care management taken in the US and how this might be applied in the UK. However, what I'm most satisfied with is my new found interest in vascular surgery and also my increased confidence in participating in more practical elements of medicine and surgery. I would like to have seen a wider variety of patients and to have had a more rounded experience of renal medicine, however, I still feel I learnt a lot and the knowledge and skills that I have obtained will definitely help me in my future career as a doctor. I must also note that I really enjoyed my time in New Orleans and got to experience a lot of new and exciting things away from the hospital.