

## St. John's Eye Hospital, Jerusalem

Having been interested in Ophthalmology since the exposure during our clinical attachments in medical school, I wanted to organise a diverse elective which explores all three crucial areas of Ophthalmology – clinical, research and outreach. Therefore, I have participated in a four week research elective at the Imperial College Ophthalmology Research Group in Western Eye Hospital, London, and a four-week clinical and outreach elective at St. John's Eye Hospital, Jerusalem. I have chosen these destinations because I wanted to challenge myself and broaden my experience in a new setting, whilst developing skills that can be beneficial to my future career in the UK.

For the first part of my elective, I joined Mrs. Rashmi Akshikar at the Imperial College Ophthalmology Research Group at Western Eye Hospital in London, focusing mainly on retina as a sub-specialty. I was encouraged to get involved in various research projects and familiarise myself with the publication process. During my time there I was also able to take the initiative to attend various retinal clinics and theatre sessions, which was a valuable opportunity to consolidate my clinical ophthalmology knowledge before my clinical attachment in Jerusalem.

For the following four weeks I travelled to Jerusalem to join the team at St. John Eye Hospital. St. John Eye Hospital is the only charitable provider in the West Bank and treats patients regardless of ethnicity, religion or ability to pay. The main hospital in East Jerusalem where I was mainly based is the tertiary referral centre; I have also taken the opportunity to work at several bases for Ophthalmology care across the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

As my elective was during Ramadan, I was able to experience and learn to adapt to patient needs during the holy season. A usual day would start around 8am and finish around 2pm, although days on Outreach would be longer. I was able to spend time in various clinics and theatres – for example in cornea, cataract, and glaucoma clinics, as well as in paediatrics, medical and vitreo-retina units. The staff kindly provided me with a teaching scope which fits on to the slit lamp, and this gave me valuable experience looking at the fundus at the same time as the ophthalmologist examines the patient. I have also spent time with a resident who taught me how to examine patients using the slit lamp; as well as times with the nurses, orthoptists and optometrists performing various imaging and diagnostic neurological tests (E.g. OCT, FAF etc). I was also honoured to have the chance to visit and examine patients in the Muristan Clinic in Old City, Jerusalem, which has been there since the beginning of St. John's history – first started treating patients 900 years ago.

St. John also runs an Outreach service five days a week because accessing medical care for many patients and refugees in the surrounding areas is difficult. Everything needed to set up an Ophthalmology Clinic (including slit lamps with their tables) is packed into the back of a mini bus which travels to a community building or doctor's surgery in a surrounding village. The Outreach team sees difficult cases which may have been booked by a local doctor, common ophthalmological conditions in the region (allergy, blepharitis, keratoconus), performs diabetic retinopathy check-ups and makes referrals for further investigations. I was involved in co-ordinating appropriate management plans of patients with the rest of the team, which was an extremely rewarding experience.

The staff at St. John were very knowledgeable and extremely helpful in teaching me about various ophthalmological conditions despite tight time schedules. It was intriguing to learn about the differences and constraints facing the healthcare system in Jerusalem, and in turn, to better appreciate what we have in the UK. This elective has undoubtedly been the highlight of my time in medical school as I have been able to explore ophthalmology in much greater depth. The experience as a solo elective student has enabled me to push myself out of my comfort zone and gave me confidence in working in a different cultural environment later on in my career. I have met patients

and staff from all three communities in Jerusalem (Jewish, Muslim and Christian), whose experiences and stories will forever live in my memory.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge all those who have contributed in making this elective an unforgettable experience. Those include my supervisors Mrs. Rashmi Akshikar and Dr. Omar Abdel Dayem and their respective teams. Furthermore, I am grateful to the Jewish Medical Association Elective Award Committee for their generous financial support in making this elective possible.

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