

## **Paediatrics, Ziv Medical Centre / Bar Ilan University Medical School, Safed, Israel**

### **Location**

I undertook my senior elective in Paediatrics in the small city of Safed in the north of Israel. Safed is around 2.5 hours away from Tel Aviv, around 20 km from the Syrian border and around 7 km from the Lebanese border.

During my elective, I was based in the General Paediatrics department of the local University teaching hospital (Ziv Medical Center). I was warmly welcomed by Professor Anthony Luder, the Director of Paediatrics at Ziv, and his colleagues. With only 30 beds, the Paediatrics Department at Ziv is quite a small one. I therefore had the opportunity to spend time in the general inpatient department, clinics, in the A&E department and also had a week in Neonatology.

### **Daily routine and learning opportunities**

The day would start at 8.30 with a departmental meeting where all the patients on the ward would be discussed, going through newly admitted patients in a lot of detail. This was a good learning opportunity, as thorough explanations were often provided for the benefit of the junior doctors as well as the medical students. After the meeting, there would be a grand round where all the patients would be seen, patients were allocated to doctors on the ward and decisions on management were made. For the rest of the morning, various jobs needed to be done so I would generally join the doctors and go see patients with them. A further ward round happened early in the afternoon. For the rest of the day, I would usually go to the paediatric A&E to see patients there. In addition, I also had the opportunity to go to theatre and to clinics. Teaching on the ward was usually centred around the presentation and management of the patients on the ward, and doctors were generally very friendly and happy to discuss cases with me. In addition, I learnt a lot from them about Medicine in Israel, and in particular in the north, where the population is truly multicultural – Orthodox Jewish communities exist side by side with Arabic towns, Druze villages and Bedouin villages, and there are also many Syrian refugees coming across the border. Ziv is the closest hospital to the Syrian border, so they often come there seeking medical care

I also had the opportunity to spend a week in the Neonatology department. I joined a group of local medical students, and because of this there was a lot of formal teaching in the form of tutorials, bedside teaching and student presentations. Here I had the opportunity to build on my previous Neonatology knowledge (having done 5 weeks of neonatology in the UK). I found it really helpful and interesting. In fact, the experience made me place Neonatology on the list of my potential specialty choices. I also very much enjoyed meeting the local students and learning about their experience of studying medicine in Israel, as well as living and studying in a relatively remote part of the country.

Overall, I definitely managed to meet my main elective objective – to get more experience in Paediatrics. Israel is by and large very similar to the UK in terms of the conditions most commonly encountered and also in terms of facilities and access to care, so this made it highly relevant to my future training in Europe.

In addition, my elective in Israel was above everything else a journey into discovering other cultures. Israel has such rich and turbulent history, both ancient and recent, and the effects of this can be felt everywhere. The north is perhaps the most diverse part of Israel with all the different cultures, ethnicities and religions existing alongside each other. AS an example, it is not unusual to hear 3 different languages spoken on the ward or in theatre at the same time – Hebrew, Russian and Arabic are all very well represented. I found this multiculturalism fascinating, and the experience really enriched my understanding of cultures that I have previously only heard about.

Israel is also a very modern and well-developed country; however, the more remote regions of Israel are very different to the bustling modernity of Tel Aviv or Haifa. I had the unique opportunity to see this clash between modernity and the more traditional way of living of Orthodox Jewish communities and the various minorities who live in the north. Some of it was difficult, and it was only through the helpful explanations of the local doctors that I managed to understand a little bit about the cultural differences. This experience helped me a lot to be much more culturally aware, and more conscious that I, coming from Europe, see things through my Western eyes, easily judging or dismissing people, when in fact it

may be that I simply have to acknowledge that my view is just one of many and that doesn't necessarily mean it is the right one.

### **Challenges**

The biggest challenge during my elective was the language barrier. It was difficult for me to estimate this accurately before going, and despite knowing that Hebrew will be the primary language used, I was surprised to see that in Safed, the use of English is very limited, whether that goes for bus stops or hospital signs. Fortunately, the majority of the doctors on the ward were happy to speak English with me, and I learnt a lot from their helpful translations and explanations. Unfortunately, it did not help me understand the nuances of the conversations between the parents, children and the doctors and at times I struggled with not knowing what was going on. However, the experience helped me to be more comfortable with persevering and asking for help when I need it, and this is certainly a useful skill.

### **Beyond Medicine**

Outwith the time spent in the hospital, I had the opportunity to travel far and wide in Israel. I stayed in the country for a few more days after the end of my elective to make the most out of my trip. I travelled to many places around the Galilee and along the northern coastline, visited Haifa, Akko, Nazareth and Caesarea as well as the desert in the south – Mizpe Ramon, the Dead Sea, Masada, Ein Gedi, and of course also spent a few days in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Israel has some spectacular scenery and beautiful culture as well as an utterly fascinating history, so rich and complex that few places around the world could compare to it. I met many friendly and welcoming Israelis along the way, whether it was people in the hospital in Safed, who kindly drove me to the hospital every morning and answered all my questions, or my amazing hosts who looked out for me for a month and shared many great tips with me, or simply all the kind strangers.

I am very grateful to the Jewish Medical Association for their generous contribution towards this elective. The month I spent in Israel enabled me to get a broad experience of Paediatrics and experience a fascinating country, its culture, history and beautiful landscape, and the JMA helped me to make this possible.

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