

Please contact the IT Officer at it@insight.org.au to be put in touch with this placement participant for further information.

Placement

Cambridge Breast Unit, Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge, UK, NHS

Dates of Placement

22 May 2017

The Application Process

Applications for Addenbrookes Hospital placements open in February/March the year before. I.e. I applied in March 2016 to do my placement in May/June 2017. The application is a 3 –stage process and there are different requirements at each stage. You need to ensure that you prepare your documents early in order to apply on time and maximize your chances of being offered a spot, as it's first come first serve. The rotations are 6 weeks; when you apply, you need to specify that you are required to complete a 4 week rotation as per the University of Adelaide Faculty of Medicine.

All the information you need can be found via the Cambridge Medical School website:

<https://www.medschl.cam.ac.uk/education/elective/>

Placement Structure / Typical Day

Rotation structures varied between different units, but we were given an orientation package on arrival, which included timetables and hospital guidelines/OHS material.

My days typically went from 9am-5pm, and were split between clinics and theatre. There were a number of different breast clinics; cancer clinics, postoperative/follow-up clinics, and a “20-30 y.o.” clinic (mainly dealing with benign breast disease e.g. fibroadenomas, fibrocystic change, lactational issues etc). There were 2 MDTs a week on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, beginning at 8am. There were opportunities to attend medical/radiation oncology clinics and interventional radiology sessions throughout the week as well. I was also given Friday afternoons off for “study leave” ...

I spent time out of hours e.g. during the evenings to complete clinical research and audit activities. But, there were plenty of opportunities during the rotation to go out to Cambridge after placement was finished to explore the place.

Level of Flexibility on the Placement

Again, this varied between the different rotations offered at Addenbrookes. On the Breast Unit, I was expected to attend all clinics and MDTs, and actively participate in operating theatre. Despite this, the staff were all very welcoming and made me feel part of the team.

Parallel consulting was encouraged, and I was able to conduct my own patient assessments in clinic. I was given opportunities to scrub into theatre on a regular basis, and to engage in clinical research and present my findings at unit meetings. Furthermore, I was able to meet with other specialists on the multidisciplinary team- radiologists, oncologists and pathologists- who were very keen to teach and allowed me to visit their departments and assist with procedures e.g. U/S guided biopsies etc.

Expectations and Assessment

I attended all clinics and MDTs, and be involved in operating theatre. I was expected to have a good anatomical and clinical knowledge base, particularly with regards to common breast complaints, and the risk factors, presentation, investigation and treatment of breast cancer. My clinical supervisor also set me reading/critical appraisal tasks and number of research/audit activities to complete during my rotation. However, the doctors and nursing staff were all very welcoming and made me feel part of the team. They all had an active interest in teaching, so despite the relatively high expectations, it definitely paid off. Otherwise, there were no formal assessments required on this rotation- just the SSE attendance form.

Skills Gained

- History and breast examination
- Basic surgical skills- scrubbing in, suturing
- Multidisciplinary care and presentation of complex cases
- Basic radiological skills e.g. U/S
- Data collection, research and audit writing/presentation

Placement Highlights

- Building up my clinical and surgical skills, getting involved in research and networking with junior doctors and specialists from around the world
- Opportunities for travel within and out of the UK
- Getting involved in student life at Cambridge- particularly once exams were over!
- Meeting students from different parts of the world- UK, Switzerland, Ireland, Philippines

Challenging Aspects of the Placement

The attendance requirements for this rotation seemed to be much more demanding than some of the other units at Addenbrookes. I was also given research and audit tasks that I initially found challenging; however, the staff were all very accommodating and assisted me in collating data and editing my drafts. I also sat in on some very confronting consultations- e.g. breaking bad news re. cancer prognosis. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is an inevitable part of a career in medicine, and being able to hold difficult conversations is an essential skill for any doctor.

Despite these challenges, I felt very well supported during this rotation, not only by the medical staff, but also the admin staff in charge of the Cambridge medical elective, and by my friends/peers at the university.

Other Activities

There was plenty to see and do in Cambridge- it's a beautiful place, with a fantastic atmosphere. It's a university town with a youthful population, so there were plenty of festivals and sporting events on. And, when exams were finished- lots of parties...

Would recommend touring the colleges, visiting the Sunday markets and going punting on the River Cam. The Eagle Pub is worth a visit too (it's the place where Crick and Watson announced that they had discovered DNA).

On the weekends, we went travelling throughout the UK- London, Edinburgh, York etc. There are plenty of very pretty historic towns nearby to visit as well; all accessible by train, and very affordable.

Would you recommend this placement to someone interested in global health?

Our public hospital system, in terms of its clinical practices, shares many similarities with the public hospital system in the UK. The focus of this rotation was clinical assessment, multidisciplinary care and clinical research. It did not provide as strong a focus on global public health issues (other than breast cancer), or the healthcare challenges encountered in less economically developed countries worldwide.

Regardless, I would still highly recommend the Cambridge Breast Unit rotation for those interested in breast surgery, oncology and clinical research.