

Elective Prize Report
Waikato Hospital, Hamilton, New Zealand



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I organised my elective in Waikato Hospital in Hamilton, New Zealand hoping to gain experience of a variety of skin conditions as well as learning about how New Zealand's healthcare system deals with these conditions. I was also looking forward to being able to assist with a research project in the department into dermatoscopic attachments for smartphones.

I spent 6 weeks on placement in the dermatology department and spent half of my time in clinics with each of the 4 consultants, with the other half set aside for project work. I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent in clinic and the varied and diverse nature of the conditions and patients that presented.

I was surprised to learn during my first week that two thirds of New Zealanders will develop skin cancer and New Zealand has the highest rate of melanomas in the world. There were several reasons for this; a climate with greater UV exposure, a large number of people with outdoor occupations and a lack of awareness of the risks of excessive sun exposure in the past. I found that this really demonstrated to me the importance of public awareness of the risks of excessive sun exposure and it was interesting to see how the healthcare system managed such a large burden of disease.

The dermatology department at Waikato Hospital made much greater use of teledermatology than I had seen in either of the two hospitals in Belfast where I had undertaken dermatology placements through my time at Queen's University. Many patients had images taken offsite by experienced photographers and reviewed on a Friday morning in the Virtual Lesion Clinic (VLC). This allowed the dermatologist to review dozens of patients in one session, many of whom it was decided did not need an appointment, saving time for the dermatologist as well as for the patient while also reducing the distance patients need to travel if they can be photographed closer to home. The VLC also proved to be an excellent teaching opportunity allowing students to see many lesions in a short period of time, discuss the relevant history and characteristic features of each lesion and how the dermatologist would manage each.

While on my elective I worked on a project to evaluate the use of various smartphone attachments to take dermatoscopic images and to assess if an accurate diagnosis could be made by a dermatologist based on the dermatoscopic images alone. The devices ranged in cost from around US\$80 to over US\$500. If accurate diagnoses can be made with the low cost devices then they could potentially be purchased by GPs to assist in making referrals in



Dermatoscopic attachments for the iPhone and iPod touch under investigation

the future. My role involved compiling the images taken from nearly 100 patients with each of the devices to produce an online survey that would be sent to dermatologists for assessment as well as completing the collection of histology reports. I really enjoyed getting involved with a research project and found that I learnt not only about the ins and outs of carrying out research, but also gained massively from seeing hundreds of images and comparing them to histology reports. It was fascinating to see the range of different ways that each condition can present, but also to see how benign and malignant conditions can often appear very similar.

Finally I would like to thank Honorary Associate Professor Amanda Oakley as well as everyone else in the dermatology department at Waikato Hospital for helping to organise such an enjoyable and interesting elective, and the British Association of Dermatologists for their generous grant towards my elective.