



British Association  
of Dermatologists

*healthy skin for all*



**Alice Holden**

**University of Aberdeen**

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I would firstly like to express how grateful I am to the British association of Dermatologists for their very generous grant to help fund my elective, without which I would not have had

the chance to observe dermatology in such a fantastic overseas location, or had such experience in the specialty that I hope to pursue as my future career.

During my final year of medical school, I arranged to complete an elective project in Dermatology at the Skin Centre in Tauranga, New Zealand. This institution is New Zealand's premier dermatological surgery facility and through this elective I have managed to gain hands-on experience in this fascinating specialty, as well as improve my knowledge of both rare and common dermatological conditions.

Tauranga is famous for its beautiful beachside location and pleasant climate; however, it is less favourably known for its high incidences of melanoma skin cancer, with an incidence even higher than that of Queensland, Australia. As a result, I witnessed several patients newly diagnosed with melanoma and through following their journey, gained some insight into the initial diagnosis and management of this malignancy.



The beach at Mt Maunganui, Tauranga

One of my main objectives for this elective was to improve my confidence in diagnosing and managing common skin disorders, which I achieved through attending clinics and shadowing the dermatologists working at the Skin Centre. I observed many patients receiving treatment for conditions such as acne, psoriasis, eczema and rosacea. I have become more proficient in taking a dermatology patient history and have developed my knowledge of common medications used to treat these skin conditions.

Through accompanying the dermatologists to the Tauranga Public Hospital for clinics and seeing in – patients I saw a wide range of conditions and some interesting diagnostic challenges. I discussed some of the more difficult cases with the dermatologists and gained some insight into how to approach diagnostic uncertainties in practice. I was encouraged to examine patients and give differential diagnoses, and try to formulate my own investigations and management plans which, although challenging at first, has reinforced to me the importance of taking detailed histories and to have a more structured approach in management of patients.

One of my other ambitions for the elective was to obtain some experience in dermatological surgery, an area of expertise that I am particularly passionate about. I gained worthwhile experience through assisting in theatre sessions, which has improved my knowledge of surgical techniques and allowed me to learn new practical skills. I scrubbed in for Mohs surgery lists and was fascinated to oversee the fastidious processing of tumours removed by this technique. I loved observing the skill involved in reconstructions and the careful planning of closures to provide the best cosmetic and functional result. I also enjoyed my time spent in Mohs theatre as in addition to assisting in theatre, I could improve on my pathology knowledge and become more competent in identifying different cell types within the skin and learning how to recognize the histological features of basal cell carcinoma compared to squamous cell carcinoma. I feel much more confident in my knowledge of dermatopathology due to the valuable teaching I received on this subject.

Throughout my time in New Zealand, I truly appreciated the psychological impact that dermatological disease can have on patients. I witnessed a teenage patient missing school due to bullying because of her acne, and an older patient who was having trouble maintaining intimate relationships due to vulval lichen sclerosus, which had been resistant to previous treatments. Through observing the doctor's interactions with patients, I have

come to comprehend some of the ways doctors can help patients to understand their conditions and work in partnership to create treatment strategies and improve compliance.



Mohs surgical equipment for orientating tumour sample.

As part of my six weeks, I decided to do some research on patients followed up using sequential digital dermoscopy imaging (SDDI) at the Skin Centre. This system enables the comparative analysis of melanocytic lesions over time, allowing dermatologists to establish any concerning transformations. The use of this technology may reduce the number of unnecessary excisions carried out on patients as benign naevi may be identified accurately, and may also have superior sensitivity in identifying malignant melanoma at an earlier stage with a more favourable prognosis.

I created a database of patients undergoing SDDI in the Skin Centre to determine specificity and sensitivity of this technique in melanoma diagnosis, through calculating the Number Needed to Treat (NNT) and Malignant Melanoma: Melanoma in-situ ratios. I found the results were particularly promising for melanoma sensitivity, as most of the melanomas diagnosed were at an early, in-situ stage, with the potential to be completely cured.

I chose this project as I could access the images taken of melanocytic lesions which on subsequent biopsy were proven to be melanoma, which was valuable in enhancing my awareness of some of the dermoscopic criteria for melanoma diagnosis. Through reading pathology reports I also became more knowledgeable of the histologic parameters reported for melanoma, such as ulceration status and mitotic rate.

Overall, my elective was a very memorable experience which has affirmed my passion for dermatology and has inspired me to continue to pursue this specialty as my future career. I loved working alongside such skilled professionals and I thoroughly appreciate the time and effort they put into making me feel part of the team and furthering my confidence in my own skills. Through this elective I have learnt how to organise my own research projects, take a full dermatology history, manage common skin conditions and improve my suturing technique, all of which I will continue to advance throughout my time at medical school and foundation year. I have met some inspiring patients and feel honoured by their openness and trust displayed throughout appointments. I am very grateful to have received this generous grant from the British Association of Dermatologists which enabled me to achieve all of this.