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Elective Prize/Project Grant – Summer 2021

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My Elective Experience and Research Project at the Royal Free Hospital
(London, UK)

Acknowledgements

Before I begin to describe my elective experience, I would like to thank the British Association of Dermatologists for recognizing my efforts and awarding my application this BAD Elective Prize.

I would also like to thank my elective and research supervisors, Dr Sharleen Hill and Dr Sandy McBride for overseeing my work over the duration of my placement and project. Additional thanks to all other Dermatologists at the Royal Free Hospital for welcoming me to their clinics and sharing their valuable time and knowledge with me.



The Royal Free Hospital, photograph from RFH website

In May and June 2021, I spent 5 weeks with the Dermatology Team at the Royal Free Hospital. The specialty caught my attention during my 2-week long placement within it in 5th year and I hoped to explore it further during my elective. During my placement, I was fortunate to take part in a combination of clinical and research-based activities.

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Over the course of 5 weeks, I sat in on a wide variety of clinics. Those included clinics specialising in psoriasis, eczema, connective tissue diseases, acne, skin cancer and emergency skin problems. Although I had some understanding of the most common skin conditions from my previous placements and outside reading, more often than not patients presented with unusual signs and symptoms, so diagnosis and management frequently proved challenging to my untrained eyes. I realised no day is ever dull when practicing a specialty with thousands of diagnoses. I also greatly valued the independence I had during my elective and the trust some consultants placed in me by allowing me to see patients independently (with close supervision).

I was also very glad to undertake my placement in a tertiary hospital, as I was able to observe consultations with several patients involved in clinical trials. Through these trials and the specialised psoriasis and eczema services at the Royal Free, I was exposed to a number of new biologic treatments for these inflammatory conditions – something which would be possible at few other hospitals. I was incredibly impressed by how well biologic medications worked and by how patients described them to be life changing. This really drove home the message of just how debilitating severe skin conditions can be for patients, both physically and psychologically.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Prior to undertaking my elective at the Royal Free Hospital, I became involved in a research project with the Psoriasis Team. The project is a pilot study for a walk and talk intervention for patients suffering with psoriasis. The aim of the project is to provide peer-support for people with psoriasis and measure primary (UCLA loneliness scale and relational health index scale) and secondary outcomes (levels of physical activity, cardiovascular risk, psychological wellbeing, quality of life, lifestyle, and psoriasis activity). The project begun in March 2021 and will continue for at least another 1.5-2 years. During my elective, I helped to recruit patients to focus groups and helped to develop questions and slides for said focus groups

(due to take place in July). I also gained valuable experience in finalising the study protocols and completing the IRAS application. During the elective I was also hoping to begin background data collection for our cohort. Unfortunately, this had to be postponed and will be completed after my placement. This project is an excellent learning opportunity for me, and I will continue my involvement with the team until the project's completion.

During my placement I also became involved in an audit reviewing referrals sent to teledermatology and rapid access dermatology clinics. We decided to examine the quality of referrals in January-March 2019 (pre-COVID) and January-March 2021 (during COVID). Together with one of the registrars, we prepared a protocol and spreadsheet for data collection. I collected trial data of about 70 patients, after which we reviewed the data and agreed to proceed with a slightly reduced list of characteristics to analyse. Similarly to the *Walk and Talk* project, this audit extends beyond my elective placement – we aim to complete it by the end of the year.

My elective experience with the Dermatology Department at the Royal Free Hospital was overwhelmingly positive. I experienced first-hand what life as a dermatologist looks like, interacted with incredibly welcoming and knowledgeable clinicians, gained invaluable research experience and enjoyed every moment spent with the team. This placement reaffirmed me in my decision to pursue a career in dermatology, and I am excited to gain further informal experience in this specialty during my foundation training.