

## Elective Report

Julia Gasson

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### Contact information

Penjani Sichinga  
sichingapenjani@yahoo.co.uk  
David Gordon Memorial Hospital  
PO Box 5, Livingstonia, Malawi .

I spent my elective at the David Gordon Memorial Hospital which is a 100 bed hospital in Northern Malawi, established in the early 1900s by the Scottish Missionary, Dr Robert Laws. It is situated on a plateau with stunning views over Lake Malawi, Tanzania and the Nyika National Park.

The hospital has 4 wards (male, female, paediatric and obstetrics), as well as an outpatient department, ophthalmology department and extensive community outreach programmes. Patients have to pay for their stay (equivalent to approximately 20p per night) and their treatment and the hospital is funded by this and by foreign donations through the church. Due to this foreign aid the hospital has a few more facilities than some of the government hospitals in the surrounding area. The laboratory tests that were available were a full blood count, urine dipstick, hepatitis B serology, HIV testing, AFB, Malaria testing (skin prick and blood film), as well as the facilities for X-rays and Ultrasound scans.

The hospital is staffed by four clinical officers (two general, one ophthalmologist and one anaesthetist). They were fantastic at managing a broad range of diseases that were common in this area. There were also two medical assistants who have done a 2 year diploma and worked mostly in the outpatient department. The qualified nursing staff worked in the obstetric department and the remaining wards were staffed by nurses who had done a 1 year diploma. They were responsible for the majority of the 'ward work' and were the main people who helped us with translating.

We were fortunate to see a wide range of diseases whilst working in the David Gordon Memorial Hospital. Lots of diseases were common to the UK (e.g. heart failure, diabetes, and pneumonia) and it was good experience to be able to diagnose and manage these diseases. We were also exposed to tropical diseases e.g. malaria and schistosomiasis. Due to the delayed presentation of the majority of patients (due to lack of money, poor transport and a persisting reliance on traditional medicine) clinical signs tended to be more advanced at presentation.

Whilst we were on our elective there were only 1-2 clinical officers working which meant we were quickly given a lot of responsibility. Rob and I worked on the female and male wards and Laura worked on the paediatric ward. We ran the ward rounds, decided on admissions and discharges, devised management plans and had plenty of prescribing practice. This was initially quite daunting but a fantastic opportunity to actually contribute to this community and also to develop our own confidence in clinical practice.

Twice a week the ambulance collected people from the bottom of the plateau, so on Mondays and Fridays there were a larger number of new admissions from around 5pm who we would clerk in and manage. Throughout the rest of the week, new patients either hired the ambulance privately or would arrive on foot. There was also surgery on most Tuesdays and Thursdays where a wide range of

procedures were undertaken and if you were interested then students could easily scrub in and take part.

There is a monthly rotation of community clinics to very rural villages some of which are only accessible by boat. This was a fantastic opportunity to experience very rural medicine! Finally, the hospital is keen for students to be involved in teaching and we ran a session on hypertension and on shock, both areas which were very poorly managed.

We organised our elective through Penjani (see contact details) and he is very happy to have more students in the future. The maximum number at any one time is 3, any more than this and students may struggle to get enough out of the experience. We stayed at the Stonehouse, which is the only guesthouse on the plateau but there is also the opportunity to organise private accommodation.

Overall, this was a fantastic experience. The hospital staff were all exceptionally friendly and welcoming and also very appreciative of any help that we could offer. This hospital offers the opportunity to get completely stuck in and be fully managing patients on your own, as well as offering the opportunity to be involved in surgery and community clinics as much or as little as each student would like. The setting is stunning and offers a good place from which to explore some of Malawi if you want to. Overall, I highly recommend it. Please get in touch if you would like any more information.