

Mulanje Mission Hospital – Malawi

My elective placement was 4 weeks long and I spent it at Mulanje Mission Hospital in South/East Malawi. For my elective placement I wanted to experience healthcare in a developing country which faced more challenges in comparison to the healthcare in the UK.

I became aware of the charity AMECA through university, and through their online database I was able to research into each hospital in more detail to find a placement that would allow me to achieve the most during my time there. By doing this I found Mulanje Mission Hospital which had both a paediatric ward and a nursery (neonatal ward), which was exactly what I was looking for with training to be a paediatric nurse. AMECA kindly supported me with a bursary which enabled me to embark on this amazing experience!

During my placement at Mulanje Mission I had 3 outcomes to achieve which focused on Professional, Ethical and Legal aspects of nursing care.

1. To observe how an initial assessment of a patient is carried out.
2. To explore the ethical issues around breastfeeding for HIV negative babies who have HIV positive mothers.
3. To look into how consent for treatment is gained in children aged 0-18 years old.

During my time at Mulanje Mission I assisted in admitting a number of very sick children onto the Children's Ward. It was very eye opening to see that the majority of the time children weren't brought into hospital until they were already very sick. The observations which were carried out were fairly similar to those done in the UK, but sometimes equipment dependant (Eg. The blood pressure cuff size available). The majority of children were also tested for Malaria on admission, and with most of these testing positive it shows that although this may not be the initial reason for admission, Malaria can be a secondary and potentially fatal factor of their illness.

Before I went to Malawi I didn't know a huge amount about HIV or the treatment, however I feel my knowledge has developed so much during my placement. I learnt a lot on the wards and even more when I assisted at the Preventing Mother To Child Transmission (PMTCT) clinic. I now understand more about the anti-retrovirals given to both mothers/adults and children. After reading the World Health Organisation guidelines on exclusive breastfeeding and seeing



the education given to the mothers at the clinic you can see why less infants are contracting HIV, which is such brilliant news!



Gaining consent for treatment I found works in a similar way to home, however family factors play the biggest part. Parents/guardians consent for those who are 0-14years, those 15-18years can give joint consent with their parent/guardian, and those 18+years can give their own consent. All this being said, every individuals no matter their age still has to consider family factors such as finances, food and cares. Even though counselling is given, family views effectively determine the final outcome.

One of the main things which I found very different to the UK was medicine management, not that the staff weren't competent but the storage of medication. Medication was stored in old medication tubs (often a different drug pot) with the actual drug and dose written on in pen.

During my weekends and the week after my elective period I was able to explore Malawi – Climbing to Zomba Plateaux, visiting Lake Malawi, doing a prison clinic visit (which was very eye opening) and visit Majete Wildlife Reserve to go on a game drive and a boat safari. Considering the amount of poverty in Malawi, it is a truly beautiful country with the friendliest people!

Overall my elective experience has been a very eye opening experience which has taught me so much, especially the care and treatment for those with Malaria and HIV and the extent of these conditions. Learning Chichewa to communicate with both staff, patients and their families has been very enjoyable, and being able carrying out an effective admission in Chichewa was definitely a memorable achievement. I gave blood to a patient on one of the wards and knowing that it was going to help someone in the hospital I was volunteering at was so rewarding. The support from all the staff at Mulanje Mission was brilliant, they were such a lovely team to work with!

