

SBNS Elective Report – University of Malaya Medical Centre

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Over the course of three weeks, I had the opportunity to undertake a neurosurgical elective at the University of Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC), Malaysia. The placement offered valuable exposure to a high-volume tertiary neurosurgical centre while providing insight into neurosurgical practice within a different healthcare system. Throughout my placement, I was fully integrated into the department, participating in ward rounds, operative cases, outpatient clinics, clinical discussions, and ongoing research. As an aspiring neurosurgeon, this experience enhanced my understanding of the specialty and reinforced my commitment to pursuing a career in neurosurgery.

Each day began with the neurosurgical ward round, reviewing critically unwell patients in the Neurosurgical Intensive Care Unit, before assessing inpatients and new referrals. I was actively encouraged to engage in clinical reasoning discussions with the surgical team, contributing to patient assessment, examination, radiological interpretation, and management planning. This allowed me to appreciate the complexity of neurosurgical decision-making, where clinical findings, imaging characteristics, operative risk, and patient factors must be carefully integrated to determine an individualised treatment strategy.

A particularly valuable aspect of the elective was the opportunity to follow patients throughout their entire clinical journey. From initial presentation, through operative intervention and postoperative management, to discharge planning or referral. This developed my appreciation of the multidisciplinary and longitudinal nature of neurosurgical care.

Following ward rounds, I frequently attended operating theatres, where I was exposed to a diverse range of neurosurgical procedures. Compared with my previous clinical experience in the UK, which was predominantly centred around neuro-oncology, my elective at UMMC provided significant exposure to neurosurgical trauma and emergency surgery. I observed and assisted with a variety of procedures including evacuation of acute subdural haematomas, decompressive craniectomies, external ventricular drain (EVD) insertions, and ventriculoperitoneal shunt placements. Under direct supervision, I was able to contribute to operative steps including suction, wound closure, and securing of drains, further developing my surgical technique.

In addition to trauma surgery, I gained exposure to a broad spectrum of elective neurosurgical cases including spinal procedures, meningioma resections, and vertebroplasties for compression fractures. Observing such a breadth of pathology highlighted the diversity of neurosurgery and demonstrated the adaptability required of surgeons when managing conditions affecting different anatomical regions, age groups, and clinical contexts.

Working closely with the team provided me with a much better insight into the role of a Neurosurgery trainee. I was particularly interested in the process of operative planning, where anatomical knowledge and interpretation of neuroimaging are translated into a precise surgical strategy. This was particularly evident in paediatric neurosurgery, where standard anatomical approaches were modified according to patient size and developmental stage.

Outside of theatre, I attended outpatient clinics, where I encountered a wide variety of neurosurgical conditions and gained insight into the challenges of managing patients across

different stages of disease progression. One particularly notable case involved a patient with a craniopharyngioma who developed severe panhypopituitarism following a delay in initiating postoperative hormone replacement therapy. This case highlighted the wider socioeconomic and healthcare system factors that can influence patient outcomes, including delayed presentation, referral pathways, and the challenges associated with delivering timely specialist care within a high-demand public healthcare system.

Given my strong interest in academic neurosurgery, I was keen to contribute to ongoing departmental research. I assisted with data collection for a project evaluating the accuracy of external ventricular drain and ventriculoperitoneal shunt placement within a single-centre cohort, specifically assessing shunt positioning relative to Kocher's point. This experience provided valuable exposure to clinical research and the role of surgical audits in improving procedural accuracy and patient outcomes.

Overall, this elective was an invaluable opportunity to experience neurosurgical practice within a different healthcare system and broaden my understanding of the specialty. Working as part of the neurosurgical team allowed me to further develop my clinical reasoning, gain operative experience, and contribute to departmental research. Outside of the placement, I also had the opportunity to explore Kuala Lumpur, providing valuable insight into the local culture and enriching my overall experience of learning abroad. This elective has strengthened my understanding of the demands of neurosurgical training and further confirmed my ambition to pursue a career in the specialty.

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