

## **A Hands-On Neurosurgery Elective in Cape Town**

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SBNS Elective Bursary Report



### **Groote Schuur and Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, Cape Town**

From the moment I stepped into the neurosurgical theatres, I knew this elective would shape not only my clinical skills but also the kind of doctor I aspire to become. I found myself in a setting where every case had urgency, every resource was stretched, and yet every team member approached their work with remarkable commitment. During this elective, I had the privilege of spending four weeks learning from the adult and paediatric neurosurgery teams at Groote Schuur Hospital and Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital – two outstanding tertiary centres delivering complex neurosurgical care across the Western Cape.

At Groote Schuur, I joined the team early each morning for ward rounds, followed by full days in theatre. I observed and assisted in procedures including a frontal craniotomy for meningioma, a cranioplasty, and the evacuation of an acute subdural haematoma. I also shadowed on-call doctors and attended teaching sessions at the Neuroscience Institute, gaining insight into neurocritical care, surgical decision-making, and trauma management.

In my final week, I joined the paediatric neurosurgery team at Red Cross. I observed procedures such as ventriculoperitoneal shunt insertions, cranial vault remodelling for scaphocephaly, and craniotomies for abscesses and tumours. One particularly memorable

case involved drug-resistant tuberculous meningitis, which prompted discussions about paradoxical TB responses and the complexities of managing such conditions in low-resource settings. Throughout the elective, I gained hands-on experience in theatre. I scrubbed in regularly, assisting with instrumentation, suction, saline washes, and suturing under the supervision of experienced surgeons.

Outside of clinical work, I explored the beauty of Cape Town through hikes up Table Mountain, surfing at Muzeinburg beach, visiting local food markets, and driving to nearby beaches (with penguins!). Just as importantly, I shared this experience with friends from medical school and met inspiring peers from around the world, making this elective even more meaningful.

This placement solidified my ambition to pursue a career in neurosurgery, particularly paediatric neurosurgery. The level of teaching, the sense of teamwork, and the exposure to global challenges in neurosurgery have made this an unforgettable part of my medical education. I felt fully welcomed and supported by the teams at both hospitals. I returned home with greater clinical confidence, renewed motivation, and a deeper appreciation for the value of shared learning across cultures.

I am sincerely grateful to the Society of British Neurological Surgeons for supporting this experience, and to the incredible teams at Groote Schuur, Red Cross, the University of Cape Town, and Brighton and Sussex Medical School who made it possible.