SBNS Undergraduate Elective Bursary Report 2026

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I am very grateful to the Society of British Neurological Surgeons for awarding me the Undergraduate Elective Bursary, which supported my 8-week neurosurgical elective at King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. I undertook this placement under the supervision of Mr Bassel Zebian, working alongside the paediatric and adult neurosurgery teams within a busy tertiary referral centre.

Having developed a longstanding interest in neurosurgery during medical school, I chose King's College Hospital because of its breadth of paediatric and adult neurosurgical practice, its academic environment, and the opportunity to observe complex decision-making across operative, outpatient, emergency and multidisciplinary settings. My main objectives were to deepen my understanding of neurosurgical anatomy and operative strategy, gain exposure to the perioperative management of neurosurgical patients, improve my ability to interpret relevant neuroimaging, and better understand the role of research, audit and service improvement within neurosurgery.

During the elective, I attended a wide range of paediatric and adult neurosurgical procedures. These included endoscopic third ventriculostomies, posterior fossa tumour resections, ventriculoperitoneal shunt insertions and revisions, lumbar-peritoneal shunt procedures, stereotactic biopsies, and complex hydrocephalus cases. Observing these operations allowed me to appreciate not only the technical aspects of neurosurgery, but also the importance of pre-operative planning, anatomical orientation, intraoperative decision-making, teamwork and postoperative care. I found the paediatric cases particularly formative, as they demonstrated the complexity of balancing anatomical, developmental and family-centred considerations when planning treatment.

A typical week involved attending morning handover meetings, theatre sessions, outpatient clinics and multidisciplinary team discussions. The morning meetings provided valuable insight into how neurosurgical patients are prioritised, how imaging findings are integrated into clinical decision-making, and how plans evolve depending on patient stability, operative capacity and multidisciplinary input. I also spent time with the on-call team, which gave me exposure to the acute management of neurosurgical emergencies and a clearer understanding of the demands and responsibilities of neurosurgical training.

In outpatient clinics, I observed consultations for patients with benign brain tumours, Chiari malformations, spinal stenosis, normal pressure hydrocephalus and other neurosurgical conditions. These clinics highlighted the importance of longitudinal care, shared decision-making and clear communication. I particularly valued observing conversations involving patients, parents, neurosurgeons, oncologists and clinical nurse specialists, especially in situations where treatment decisions carried significant uncertainty or long-term consequences. These experiences reinforced that neurosurgery is not only a technically demanding specialty, but also one that requires compassion, clarity and trust when supporting patients and families through life-changing diagnoses.

During the elective, I also developed my neuroradiology skills by reviewing MRI and CT imaging for both common and rare neurosurgical pathologies. Discussing imaging in the context of operative

planning helped me understand how radiological findings translate into clinical decisions and surgical approaches. This was especially useful in cases involving hydrocephalus, posterior fossa pathology, brain tumours and complex paediatric conditions.

In addition to my clinical exposure, I attended the 3-day Endoscopy in Neurosurgery 2026 course, which included lectures, cadaveric sessions and high-fidelity simulation laboratory teaching. This gave me further insight into neuroendoscopic techniques and helped me better appreciate the learning curve, anatomical understanding and technical precision required for minimally invasive approaches in neurosurgery.

A major strength of this elective was the opportunity to engage with academic neurosurgery. I contributed to data collection for several research projects, including work relating to pineal region tumours, brainstem lesions and fetoscopic repair of spina bifida. I also assisted with abstract preparation for upcoming presentations at SBNS100 and the International Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery 2026. This experience strengthened my understanding of how clinical questions arise from day-to-day practice and how research can be used to improve patient care.

I also registered and co-designed a closed-loop clinical audit focused on improving patient and family experience for elective paediatric neurosurgery admissions at King's College Hospital. This involved developing the audit methodology and designing a structured Qualtrics-based patient and parent survey to assess pre-admission information provision. The aim is to identify gaps in communication and support the development of a standardised information leaflet for families. This project has been particularly meaningful because it links clinical governance with practical, patient-centred improvement.

Overall, this elective was an extremely rewarding and motivating experience. It gave me a deeper understanding of neurosurgical practice across theatre, clinics, ward care, emergencies, MDTs, research and audit. It strengthened my interest in pursuing a career in neurosurgery and helped me appreciate the balance between technical skill, academic curiosity, multidisciplinary collaboration and compassionate patient care that defines the specialty.

I am very grateful to Mr Bassel Zebian and the paediatric and adult neurosurgery teams at King's College Hospital for their teaching, support and generosity throughout the placement. I am also sincerely grateful to the SBNS for awarding me the Undergraduate Elective Bursary, which made it possible for me to fully immerse myself in this elective and continue developing my commitment to neurosurgery.