

Name: Ernest Chew

University: University College London

Placement Dates: August 2015 (2 weeks)

Organisation	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Teaching	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Surgical Exposure	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Hands on Experience	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Hospitality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Accommodation	★ ★ ★
Overall Experience	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

'The placement at James Cook Hospital Cardiothoracic Department is a unique and wonderful experience for any medical student interested in cardiothoracic surgery.

Mr Jonathan Ferguson was my supervisor who, along with the helpful staff at RCS (Edinburgh), organised the entire placement from start to finish. The team was very welcoming and there was not one moment where I felt lost in a new environment even though I had to adapt quickly.

My aims were to gain as much theatre exposure as I could and assist in as many operations as possible which Mr Ferguson was glad to support. Even though the learning curve was steep for the first few days, it did not quell the excitement when I walked into theatres every morning to see what was on the list. During my short time, I performed thoracotomies, sternotomies, saphenous vein grafts and suturing. A lot of suturing. As a final year medical student, I also took the opportunity to examining patients before they enter into theatre which sharpened my skills in picking up heart murmurs. Above all, I learned an immense amount about cardiothoracic surgery, angiograms, anatomy and I had a taste of what it takes to be a cardiothoracic surgeon.

The most enjoyable moment was observing a VATS lobectomy. Prior to this, I have never seen one being performed. But I was in awe at the complexity of the surgery and the intricate anatomy of the thorax. At that time, I caught a glimpse of the surgeon I could become. My only regret was not having the opportunity to assist in more thoracic operations. Being in theatre everyday has also served to build upon the skills that I have picked up the day before. By the end of the placement, I was confident in performing subcutaneous suturing which has served me well in other surgical rotations.

Admittedly, there were times where the intensity does wear one out a little but I wouldn't have traded it for anything else. It only acts as a firm reminder that the surgical profession attracts people who are not only intelligent and able to work under pressure but the ones who are the most driven as well.

I would like to thank the Royal College of Surgeons (Edinburgh), Mr Ferguson and the cardiothoracic team at James Cook for this once in a lifetime opportunity. Special mention should go to the staff working in the outreach department for their kind assistance in all administrative matters. I will highly recommend any medical student interested in cardiothoracic surgery to apply for this scheme – don't let the competition put you off!