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Lessons learnt in Sri Lanka as elective students

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Abstract

Annually, a number of final year medical students from Lund University in Sweden travel to various healthcare facilities globally. We chose to go to the island of Sri Lanka, spending our elective at the department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Colombo. The dissimilarity between healthcare in Sweden and in Sri Lanka was evident throughout our stay. The design of healthcare facilities in Sri Lanka focused less on patient privacy and more on efficiency. The workload for doctors in Colombo was heavier than their Swedish counterparts. In general, outcome for Swedish patients is favourable when compared to Sri Lankan. We believe the difference in outcome is due to the unequal financial situations of the countries. Teaching approach in Sri Lanka diverted from Swedish practice by being more authoritarian but also exceedingly efficient. The large number of patients in wards and outpatient clinics allowed for us to experience a wide range of patient cases, offering important insights in medicine. It has been questioned whether the tradition of international electives is ethically justifiable. We therefore believe it important to stress that throughout our stay we were participating as observing students, not practicing doctors. We regard our elective a valuable experience, providing us with knowledge we will use in our future profession. Time spent observing Sri Lankan healthcare will also serve as a reminder to remain humble towards different cultures. We are now aware of the privileges we have, practicing medicine in a socioeconomically strong country.

Practice Highlights

- It is likely advantageous to include an international elective in medical training.
- Teaching methods and approach to teaching varies greatly between countries.
- It is important to respect and acknowledge cultural as well as financial differences between regions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Annually, a number of final year medical students from Lund University in Sweden travel to various healthcare facilities globally. We selected the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka for our elective. Sri Lanka has lately become a popular destination for outgoing elective students from Lund University. The overseas electives unit at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Colombo was officially established in 2012, but the first students started coming in 1994. The unit now caters to over 100 students per year (125 students in 2016).

The main reason for our choice of Sri Lanka as our elective destination was the good reputation of the elective program, with the welcoming and friendly

ambience known to be accompanied by an ambitious and demanding learning environment. The country remains an attractive elective destination for many doctors-to-be. The appeal of this island state seems to lie on the unique combination of advanced healthcare in a resource-limited setting spiced up with rare medical conditions and the aspects of tropical medicine. In addition, the island has much to offer in terms of the rich cultural heritage.

Obstetrics and Gynaecology was a natural choice of specialty for us since we all developed a growing interest in the field during our clinical rotation in Sweden. Also, we saw the elective as a precious opportunity to deepen our knowledge of Obstetrics and Gynaecology further, since our medical training in Sweden, including the 21-