

Stage 4 elective report 2015

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF DENTAL SCIENCES

Names: Mike Field and Melissa Atkinson

Elective country: Thailand (Burmese border)

Address of host institution (e.g. Clinic, hospital, other):

Mae Tao Clinic

Mae Sot

Tak

Thailand

Dates of elective period:

13-25 July 2014

Supervisor/contact person:

Dr Takayuki Abe (Taka)

Summary of clinical experience gained:

Multiple extractions. LA technique. Supragingival scaling. Multiple Conservation treatment. Behavioural management of child patients. Learning to communicate with people who speak a different language. Learning to work closely with translators. Learning to work with instruments not always suitable for the job required. Dental screening in schools. Mobile dentistry

Please detail any costs for accommodation:

£35 per person for two weeks in a guest house double room

What was your motivation for your choice of elective:

We wanted to do something completely different to what others had done in the past. I was disheartened by the number of 'charities' online that offered

package trips to far off countries. I was also annoyed at the extortionate prices of the companies providing these trips, and I wondered how much of it actually goes to a good cause. I decided to find my own elective and although this took a lot of time and was slightly scary, it was the best thing that could have happened. It was the first time any British dentists had visited this area, and it was also a first for students to be going. I had read a lot about what has happened in Myanmar but didn't realize the scale of the need in the area. It is a place that has been in the press for so long that people's attentions are turning elsewhere, despite the fact people there still need a lot of help.

Borderless Dentists seemed to be an excellent cause; something we both thought was thoroughly worthwhile. The communication we received from Taka, the supervisor, was very helpful and he came across as a genuinely caring person.

We wanted to visit somewhere totally new and very different to the UK. The fact we were able to experience different aspects of treatment with this charity was appealing. For instance, we were able to treat patients in the main clinic. Other days we travelled for a couple of hours to refugee camps, and provided dental treatment in the refugee camps with temporary dental equipment. We were also able to travel to the migrant schools around the area, which involved some oral hygiene instruction, check-ups and some treatment if necessary. We were also able to help gather information for an ongoing research project which Taka was undertaking in some of the migrant schools.

Did you encounter any unexpected learning experiences:

I had no expectations whatsoever, it was the first time students had been there, and to be honest I do not think Taka knew what to expect from us. Clinically it was an eye-opener, the techniques were very different, the equipment was old and often broken and the speed at which we had to treat patients was nothing like what I was used to.

We learnt to extract teeth without the equipment we would normally use in the dental hospital. The equipment was very limited, especially equipment such as forceps and local anaesthetic needles, therefore we had to quickly learn to adapt to using the equipment available to us.

Most of the time we had a translator with us, but some of the time this was not available, therefore we spent some time learning some basic Burmese which could help us in the dental setting. This was very difficult, especially when treating child patients, but it really made us realize about how important communication and body language is in dentistry.

Please give details of outcomes achieved and any barriers to achieving outcomes:

Our clinical experience benefited greatly from the experiences we had in Thailand. Our ability to work under pressure, make quick decisions, and deliver in stressful situations improved. Diagnosis improved. Being able to pass on what we learnt via BDS to people who didn't speak English was an achievement. Clinically our LA and extraction technique greatly improved, thanks to some help from Taka, as did our confidence.

When we were unable to communicate, it made us realise how important communication really is in dentistry, and I have found I now speak more to my patients and explain more about their treatments, because this is something I wanted to do on our elective but couldn't. We had a lot of experience with children, which was very good for behavioural management skills, although the children in the refugee camps were exceptionally brave.

Please give details of your most valuable personal experience of the elective:

The Burmese refugees were the happiest and most grateful people I have met. Regardless of the fact that they had no money, they would still buy us lunch, or invite us to their houses for lunch to thank us for the treatment which we had provided. Even though their political situation is currently very unstable, they were still so happy to have the small things that they do have, such as houses made of bamboo walls and leaf roofs. This attitude to life made me realise what we take for granted in England, and the stress we cause ourselves over such minor things in comparison to them.

The dental experience we gained was exceptional; we treated many patient, but personally, the difference in attitudes to life was the most valuable experience for me. I realized what is important to people when they visit the

dentist, trust. People whom I couldn't even speak to trusted me to help them. I feel that being able to communicate with people and understand what they are feeling is one of the things I have learnt the most about. I also realized that people that have the least may also be the happiest

Please provide details of social facilities available during your elective:

Mae Sot is a border town between Myanmar and Thailand, for this reason there were many NGOs to socialize with, I even met a friend of mine there that I hadn't seen for years. In the evenings Taka would take us to some great restaurants, this was a really important time that we were able to reflect on the day and ask questions. It was also great to get to know Taka and find out about life in Japan

At the weekend, we were also able to walk over the friendship bridge into Burma for the day which was an amazing experience, and very different to Thailand.

Would you recommend your elective as suitable for another student:

Yes

If so how on a scale of one to five (five the highest rating) would you rate the whole elective

6

Students in next year's 4th year may well wish to go to the same destination as you and may need to talk to you. Would you be willing to be a point of contact for them?

Yes