

# Child Abuse and Neglect – A Conference Experience

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The Federation of Family Planning Association of Malaysia recently held the 10th Asia Pacific Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect at the Raja Chulan Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. I was extremely fortunate to be able to attend this event, along with 12 of my colleagues from Melaka Manipal Medical College.

The programme began with a slide presentation on child abuse. Like any good presentation, it started by painting a gloomy picture of the epidemic of child maltreatment with statistics, causes, and features of abuse.

Child abuse is the maltreatment by the caretaker or parent to individuals under the age of 18, leading to serious harm to them. There are various types of abuse, among them physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect. While it was illuminating listening to the talks given by experts in this field, we were absolutely horrified by the things one could do to an innocent and defenceless child.

A multinational discussion of Child Sex Tourism (CST) was set up via Skype. We had the opportunity to speak to students and community leaders from the Philippines, Indonesia, Russia, and Bangladesh, with the Malaysian presence led by members of the National Child Exploitation Committee. The participants traded information and shared the advances in the war against CST in their respective countries.

The non-governmental international organisation ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) defines CST as a “sexual exploitation of children by a person or persons who travel from their home district, home geographical region, or home country in order to have sexual contract with children”. It is a form of child abuse.

Unbeknownst to many, Malaysia is deemed as one of the source countries of CST in ASEAN, and this is alarming. Our children are being targeted for commercial sexual exploitation, and existing efforts are slow in responding to this threat! Hence the staging of this event is an effort to address this issue.

Involving the input of all the participants, including recounting of past experiences by victims of the trade;



Prabakaran Ramachandran (left) and Shabbitha Gobee

this discussion was a breakthrough in our fight against CST. Most of us present were exposed to this disease that has been growing silently in the Malaysian system (and worldwide) throughout the years, and many of us resolved to play a part in arresting its development.

Raising public awareness is the first step in winning this war, and various sectors have to work hand in hand to achieve this. The Government, through its influence, can make a significant difference by taking the initiative. The media, whether mainstream or social, has an integral role to play in propagating the message to Malaysians of all colour and creed. And the tourism industry, being in the eye of the storm, has to pull out all stops to redeem its reputation of the country being a source country of the CST epidemic.

While this event may not lead to an immediate elimination of child abuse, it is a small step in the right direction. Awareness and education are the first steps in understanding an existing issue, and therefore precursors of subsequent actions in combating the issue. I am grateful to be given the opportunity to participate in this event; I hope more medical personnel will pick up the baton in the war against Child Abuse.

# Elective Posting Down Under

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## Introduction

Our elective placement took place at the Box Hill Hospital which is a teaching hospital affiliated with Monash, La Trobe and Deakin Universities in the city of Melbourne, Victoria. It is one of the seven hospitals that are governed within the Eastern Health network which provides healthcare services across the Eastern metropolitan area of Victoria. The Box Hill Hospital provides the following services; emergency care, general and specialist medicine, intensive care, mental health services for children, adolescents and adults, maternity services, post-acute care programmes and specialist surgery. Established in 1956, Box Hill Hospital is the largest of Eastern Health's acute hospitals, admitting more than 48,000 patients each year.

## Elective Placement

We applied for our elective placement through Monash University, whereby we were placed at the Box Hill Hospital. During the elective period, we spent four weeks in the plastic surgery department. We joined the plastics team of consultants and registrars, and shadowed Paul di Giovine (Registrar) as well as Bruce Wilkie (Resident).

We met a final year medical student from Monash University, and learnt about the culture in Australia

as well as how the medical education differs. Elective students were expected to attend clinic sessions, ward rounds and observe the procedures in the operation theatre from 9.00am to 5.00pm daily. Outside of working hours, we also spent time together exploring Melbourne and visiting all the famous tourist spots.

The system of medical education at Monash University is slightly different to that of our home university (UCSI). Fifth year students have very minimal classes in the university and are instead expected to attend the wards each morning and visit the patients that are assigned to them, write follow-up notes and find investigation results from the previous day. The registrar then conducts a daily ward round. If any further investigations are ordered, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure these were carried out and the results are delivered to the patients file in a timely manner.

Being responsible for our own patients is something which we had never fully experienced in Malaysia before. We found it very rewarding and captivating as the students are truly involved in the care that the patients receive. Consultant ward rounds took place weekly and after each on-call session. These ward rounds were very lengthy as each patient was discussed in detail. The emphasis was on education of students and junior doctors and these sessions taught us a great deal.



Hanisha



Shalini

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### Clinical presentation of patients during clinic sessions

Medical students in Melbourne are well integrated with the clinical firm and actively participate in patient care. We were given many opportunities to present cases during the clinic sessions in front of consultants and registrars and we found this worth the choice of coming to this placement.

This experience enhanced our confidence and now we feel that we are able to present and make valuable contributions during ward rounds and clinic sessions while back here in Malaysia and partake in the overall care of the patients.

### Observe procedures in the operation theatre

In Malaysia, we have had limited opportunities to scrub in during an operation or observe procedures in the operation theatre. Even if we are allowed in, we were instructed to observe from a certain distance. However, during this elective posting, the registrars were kind enough to allow us to scrub in during a procedure as well as explain the steps involved while they were operating. This allowed us to gain a more in depth understanding of plastic surgery.

### Experience working in an environment where there is no hierarchy system

We noticed a major difference in the healthcare working life, whereby there were no segregations between nurses, residents, registrars and consultants. All of them worked in a peaceful environment and are treated equally regardless of their post in the healthcare hierarchy which is in contrast to our local settings. In Malaysia, there seems to be a hierarchical



Shalini (left), Dr Paul di Giovine (Registrar) and Hanisha (right) in the OT

gap between the specialists, the junior doctors and medical students. Setting up a meeting with the specialists would usually require a lot of preparation and appointment ahead of time.

### Conclusion

Our elective was an extremely enjoyable and educational experience. We feel that we have learnt a lot, not only about plastic surgery, but medicine as a whole. We have experienced a different healthcare system, different culture and way of life. We feel that this has broadened our horizons and made us more knowledgeable about the world. As doctors, we will meet people from all over the world, and the experiences during this elective posting certainly met our expectations and had given us insight into how we should prepare ourselves for a medical career.

