

Swansea - Gambia Link

SWANSEA UNIVERSITY, UK AND UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA
ABERTAWE BRO MORGANNWG UNIVERSITY HEALTH BOARD
AND ROYAL VICTORIA TEACHING HOSPITAL



In October 2011, ten Swansea medical students visited the Gambia for two weeks as part of their accredited clinical apprenticeship. This was a move away from the very successful informal student exchange to a more formalized arrangement, with structured learning outcomes and oversight from a UK clinical tutor. We spent two days each rotating through specialities at the Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital in Banjul, covering paediatrics, obstetrics & gynaecology, general medicine and surgery, where we attained some insight into each area and how each department worked within the hospital. Two days were spent at the Medical Research Council and one further day at a community health centre that had been set up by the Global Fund.

During bedside and classroom teaching, we were able to see how Gambian doctors and medical students dealt with severe illness and late presentations of disease, a large proportion of which had been complicated by local healing customs, in an environment of very scarce resources. Regular opportunities to practice our clinical skills were available alongside the chance to truly understand the difficulties of practicing medicine in a developing country.

We worked closely with our Gambian colleagues, giving a unique insight into how the life of a Gambian medical student compares to life at home. On our one day off a week, the Gambians took time to show us aspects of their culture and countryside by taking us to local markets and national parks, and even inviting us to their homes. Their hospitality was overwhelming! It is hoped that our Gambian friends will be seeing us soon and experiencing life as a Swansea medical student when they come over in 2012 with money raised through the Swansea-Gambia Link.



CLASSROOM, CLINICAL SKILL & CULTURE



Gambian students present cases to their clinical tutors on a weekly basis, each followed by a dynamic discussion that explores differential diagnoses and clinical reasoning. We had the opportunity to participate in these, and also attended hospital staff meetings that discussed case management and improvements in care.

Bedside and in-theatre teaching formed a regular part of the apprenticeship. Opportunities to learn about aspects of tropical medicine were frequent, allowing us to compare the management of conditions more familiar in the UK, such as hypertension and diabetes, in an environment of limited resources for investigation and management.



Swansea and Gambian students worked closely together, providing the opportunity to see the emphasis placed on clinical skill and a strong knowledge base in Gambian medical education - a lesson to highlight our reliance on investigations to form diagnoses and management plans.



Inevitably Swansea and Gambian students built friendships with each other outside of the hospital, and in doing so were able to appreciate the wider social context that students from both countries learn medicine within.



STUDENT REFLECTION & FEEDBACK

"I thoroughly enjoyed the whole trip. It was obviously difficult at times...observing some disturbing scenes and seeing a lot of people suffering with their conditions; however I honestly think it's the best thing I've done since joining medical school"

"I believe the future of international health will be about building relationships and sharing ideas. Development is likely to be temporary if change is not mutually agreed and within the cultural framework of what is desired and possible to achieve. Building friendships through the Swansea-Gambia Link sets a foundation for the exchange of ideas, which can benefit practice in both countries."

"Personally I found the experience of going to The Gambia fantastic. I had little idea what to expect, but I would say what I got out of it was the following:

1. Watching doctors and other healthcare workers making the best out of situations where there are huge constraints on resources
2. Being able to find clinical signs relatively easily"

"The clinical apprenticeship learning outcomes were met by the students' clinical exposure and by my supervision of them. The Gambian students hosted us extremely well... And they developed a very good rapport with the Swansea students. As a group I was very impressed with our students" Clinical Supervisor.

