

Student Elective Symposium

EMMS International's Student Elective Bursary (SEB) symposium, held on 23rd January at St Silas church in Glasgow, was attended by some key influencers in the medicine and nursing worlds, such as Professor David Galloway, President of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow, Dr Tim Lavy of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children and Christian Medical Fellowship, and Dr Joan McDowell, senior lecturer in nursing and healthcare at the University of Glasgow. An enthusiastic group of medical, nursing and dentistry students came along to learn more about the scheme, and three of our alumni spoke about their elective experiences in sub-Saharan Africa.

The afternoon kicks off!

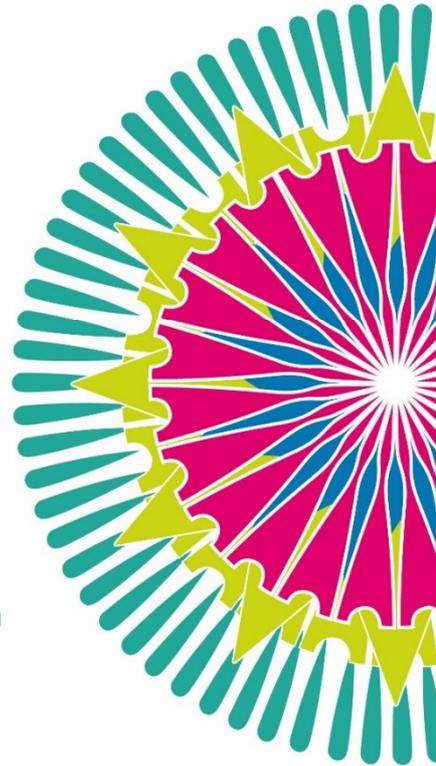
John Reid (see right) and David Knox represented our funder, the Order of Saint Lazarus, and John set the scene with a very interesting run through of the origins of the Order. In particular, he explained why the elimination of leprosy was a cause close to the heart of the Order, and highlighted the fact that the disease is a long way from being eradicated, even if we do not hear much about it in the media.

Our CEO, James Wells, laid out the main themes of the symposium. The overarching aim of the day was to consider the value of the medical elective, and along the way we were going to unpack:

- The professional long-term engagement an elective can elicit
- The value an elective generates for the host hospital
- The value an elective brings for the NHS
- The importance of partnership; of learning from one another

SEB application process

James handed over to Dr Joan McDowell, one of the assessors of EMMS International's SEB scheme. She focused on the application process, and gave hints and tips about what she looks for when reading an application



Understand the significance of *partnership* during your elective – what are you giving back to your host hospital, colleagues, patients, and new friends?

from a student. For her, it is important that the student talks about “what you are going to give, and what you are going to get in return”, so that she gets a feel of the partnership that the student is looking to build while on elective.

Joan (see right) likes to see evidence of communication that students have already had with people at their chosen elective destination – who have you talked to, and what did you discuss? She wants students to show that they have done the groundwork, and that they are able to go into some detail about their elective too – can you show an awareness of your elective objectives, however trivial they may seem?

Joan finished her presentation by highlighting the fact that students should really use the personal statement section of the application form as their time to shine. They should discuss where it is they want to go and why, and also consider what they are looking to learn from the whole experience.



Value of student medical electives

Dr Tim Lavy then took the floor, and analysed what value a medical elective taken abroad brings. He outlined the obvious benefits: you are challenging yourself, and it is a rewarding and fun experience. But then he further examined what makes it special. In Tim’s opinion, it is the sense of perspective that an elective imparts to you. A medical elective undertaken in a resource-poor setting gives you a richer understanding of things in their entirety – you are presented with a more global picture of your medical field, be that medicine, nursing, or dentistry. He said, “There is a perspective of world disease you will not pick up on if you study and work in the northern hemisphere... you find things that you would not usually see.”

He then drew on his own experience of working abroad, stating that he was able to gain valuable managerial experience (at a far earlier stage in his career than would have been possible in the UK) and had the opportunity to greatly hone his clinical skills. This brought immense value to the NHS when he returned and equipped him for leadership roles.

Tim pointed out that it may be your only chance, or just your first chance, to go abroad and learn in a practical setting. He also had some golden nuggets of advice:

- When on elective, talk to your local supervisor about things that crop up and get advice when you feel any doubt.

“There is a perspective of world disease you will not pick up on if you study and work in the northern hemisphere”

- Never put your educational interests before your patients.
- Have a look on the Christian Medical Fellowship's website at their "Saving Health" course for students about to embark on elective.

EMMS' SEB alumni

We then heard from three of EMMS International's student bursary recipients: Rachel Hammond, Jocelyn Amer, and Kirsty McCance. All three had done their electives in sub-Saharan Africa, and had hugely enjoyed the experience of living in another culture and learning about medicine. One memorable anecdote revealed the extent that doctors and nurses will go to in order to simply bring comfort to a patient. Rachel was in Malawi, at the Palliative Care Support Trust, and accompanied staff on a home visit. Unfortunately, due to severe flooding, a bridge had collapsed, which seemingly put an end to their attempts to reach this patient. However, the doctors and nurses got out of their jeep undeterred and hoisted the medical supplies above their heads. They carefully traversed the river with Rachel following behind in awe! When they arrived at the patient's house, he was similarly awestruck, saying "I can't believe you came".

For Rachel, that was a defining moment. Even though there was so little that could be done for this patient with end stage renal failure, just their presence, and the effort that had been made to reach him, was a comfort.

Valuable reflections

Rounding off the event, Professor Galloway discussed his own experience of providing healthcare in a mission hospital in Zambia. He echoed many of the sentiments that had been previously expressed in saying that "electives bring tremendous maturity and perspective" and he could not praise doing a medical elective in a resource-poor setting highly enough. He reminded us all that 143 million more procedures are needed annually, and that there are still five billion people who cannot access the healthcare they need.

**"Electives
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Tony Gaston, EMMS International's Relationships Manager, then closed the event with some reflections of his own. Tony has had the good fortune to visit many of EMMS International's projects, and, like Rachel, he has

been particularly affected by the compassion shown to patients by hospital staff. Tony is always inspired by the committed staff when he sees how they achieve so much with so little.

Some main points to take away from the event are:

- Electives are a chance to **build real partnership** between the student and the host hospital and host country.
- Going to resource-poor hospitals provides students with invaluable opportunities to **greatly hone their skills and make a significant impact**.
- Each speaker touched on how **unforgettable** their experience was.
- Students are able to gain a **huge sense of perspective** while on elective; going to a less-equipped setting means being presented with illnesses unseen in the northern hemisphere.
- A holistic approach to healthcare matters; the **compassion and comfort** brought to patients by hospital staff members is awe-inspiring.

We hope to hold Student Elective Symposiums again in the future, so sign up for updates by visiting our website: <https://www.emms.org/>