

BSG Undergraduate Elective by Daniel Berlofsky

Daniel Berlofsky was inspired by the experiences and challenges to healthcare in New Zealand.

I spent 8 weeks with the Gastroenterology department, mainly focusing on endoscopy, specifically endoscopic mucosal resection (EMR).

I saw many interesting cases, one of which was a 45M from Kiribati, which is a small island in the central Pacific Ocean. He was working in NZ as a fruit picker and developed acute liver failure after contracting acute hepatitis B. He was not eligible for a liver transplant due to his visa status and therefore the only treatment available was antivirals. Unfortunately, he also did not get an interpreter until 2 weeks into his inpatient stay which meant he did not understand his condition, resulting in him pulling out his feeding tube. The lack of access to an interpreter was unexpected in a well-funded NZ healthcare system and not dissimilar to the experience of some patients in the NHS.

The majority of patients we saw were patients with IBD, Metabolic dysfunction-associated steatosis liver disease, alcoholic liver disease or patients with liver cirrhosis due to chronic hepatitis B or C. I encountered similar issues to the UK with alcoholism being proportionately higher in lower socioeconomic groups and Māori.

My most enjoyable experience on my elective was the time I spent in endoscopy. I went to a variety of lists, my supervisor mainly focused on EMR, but I also saw patients undergo OGDs.

I was also very fortunate to have some time to travel to parts of the North and South Islands of New Zealand. I was lucky enough to see Milford Sound in the rain, with lots of waterfalls cascading down the fjord. I also visited Waitangi Treaty Grounds, where I learnt about Māori history and culture. It was eye opening to learn about the challenges Māori people have faced due to the colonisation of NZ and the subsequent land loss they suffered.

Overall, my 8 weeks in New Zealand were the best 8 weeks of medical school in terms of access to teaching and enjoyment. I have been inspired to continue my pursuit to enter internal medicine training.

Daniel Berlofsky