

BSG Undergraduate Elective by Mhairi Finlayson

From 21st October to 13th December 2024, I was based at the Gastrointestinal Unit at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh. I was fortunate enough to be supervised by Dr Shahida Din, consultant gastroenterologist and leading clinician for clinical trials with National Research Scotland.

At the start of my elective, I completed the National Institute for Health and Care Research's "Good Medical Practice" training, which provided a fantastic overview of the standards and ethical conduct that must be adhered to when carrying out clinical research.



RCPE in Association with ACG & SSG – Gastroenterology: A Global Perspective

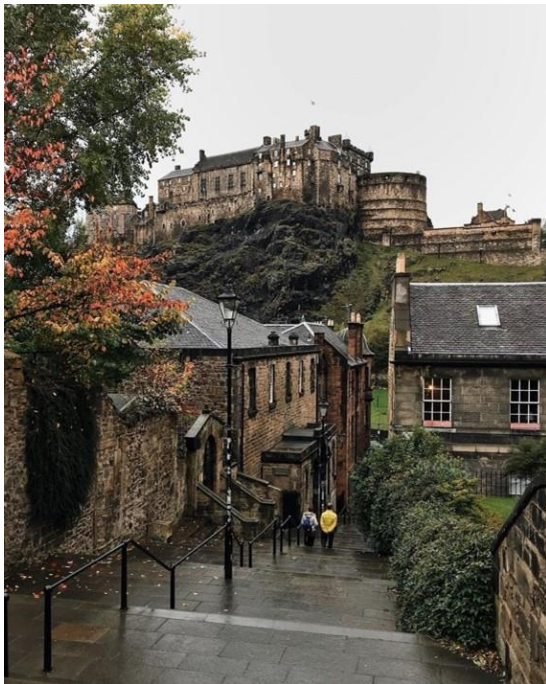
I also undertook a course run by the Edinburgh Clinical Research Network: "Planning and Conducting a Systematic Review" which gave me an in-depth insight into each stage of the process of carrying out a review. This course helped to lay the foundations for starting work on a systematic review and meta-analysis on inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)-associated colorectal cancers alongside one of the clinical research fellows. This is a project I hope to continue after the elective period has ended.

I gained clinical exposure through attending an inflammatory bowel disease clinic. Seeing patients and hearing their daily struggles with their condition and how these impact on every aspect of their lives opened my eyes to the all-consuming nature of these chronic conditions. I observed brilliant examples of collaborative care and shared decision making with regards to treatments and surgery. I also attended an endoscopy list, allowing me to see endoscopies and colonoscopies. I was struck by the requirement for efficiency, skill and thoroughness in practical procedural work which must be carefully balanced with continuous patient reassurance and communication.

On 6th November I attended the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (RCPE) symposium "RCPE in association with ACG & SSG - Gastroenterology: A Global Perspective". This was an inspiring day which saw gastroenterologists share new findings in their respective specialist fields. I enjoyed speaking to clinicians and learning how approaches and attitudes towards care varies between countries. Together with

some of my colleagues from the GI unit, we wrote summaries of the talks to submit a synopsis for publication in the next RCPE journal.

The main work of my elective involved assisting the Edinburgh centre data collection for a multi-centre cohort study ran by the European Crohn's and Colitis Organisation (ECCO) as part of their Collaborative Network for Exceptionally Rare Case Reports (CONFER), which aims to learn more about the efficacy of various advanced therapies for microscopic colitis.



Another project I was involved in is a study which aims to analyse tissue and genetic biomarkers that may predict the development of inflammatory bowel disease-associated colorectal cancers. This was a larger project involving the Edinburgh IBD unit, The University of Edinburgh and Sanger. It was fascinating to see such a diverse multitude of specialties – pathologists, gastroenterologists and biostatisticians – working together on this project. My role involved gathering clinical data on patients with IBD who provided dysplastic tissue samples.

Other than elective work, I managed to explore the beautiful city of Edinburgh and enjoy its rich history and scenic views.

I am incredibly grateful to the British Society of Gastroenterology for giving me the opportunity to fully embrace this elective period. The skills and experiences I have gained from this time will serve me well in my future career as a doctor.

Mhairi Finlayson, The University of Aberdeen