

Reflections on a clinical observership in London: Lessons and impact on medical training

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Introduction

Medicine is a dynamic profession, and international exposure and collaborations are essential for professional growth and the advancement of healthcare practices. Clinical observerships serve as invaluable opportunities for medical professionals to gain first-hand experience in diverse healthcare settings. In this reflective piece, I provide a detailed account of a clinical observership experience in London, exploring its impact on my personal and professional development, and advocating for similar opportunities for doctors, particularly those in South Sudan.

Background to the observership

The clinical observership discussed was initiated by Martina Lagu Yanga, Head of Medical Education and Training NHS England Leadership Education Fellow and Mr Edward Lee, Consultant Ophthalmologist and Vitreoretinal Surgeon at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust. With a vision to promote global collaboration and knowledge exchange in healthcare, Martina spearheaded this programme to offer international medical graduates, including those from South Sudan, exposure to the UK healthcare system. The observership aimed to bridge cultural and professional gaps, fostering a deeper understanding of medical practices and enhancing skills essential for global medical practitioners.

In terms of professional gaps that this observership bridged, I gained insights into the operational intricacies and best practices of the UK healthcare system, broadening my understanding of different clinical protocols and approaches. In addition, the observership provided exposure to diverse patient demographics and medical conditions, thereby enhancing my clinical knowledge and diagnostic skills. Overall, this observership played a crucial role in equipping me with the necessary skills and perspectives to thrive as a global medical practitioner

Accommodation and activities

As a participant in the observership, I was provided accommodation at the Undergraduate Hostel for International Students, in Epsom, a town near London. This hostel offered comfortable rooms equipped with great amenities such as a sitting room, a well-equipped kitchen, free Wi-Fi and fully furnished common areas, fostering a sense of community among residents.

Activities during this observership included rotations across various medical departments, participation in medical education workshops and events, and



Figure 1. Working at Epsom Hospital



Figure 2. Outside St Helier Hospital

cultural immersion experiences. From attending grand rounds to engaging in leadership training sessions, participants gained invaluable insights into both clinical practices and cultural nuances within the UK healthcare system. Sightseeing tours and cultural events further enriched the experience, offering participants a holistic understanding of life and healthcare in London (Figures 1 and 2).

The day typically began with an early morning start, with participants arriving at their designated hospital sites to commence their rotations. For medical graduates, residents, and international medical graduates, the working hours varied based on their specific rotations and schedules, which could include shifts during the day, evenings, or nights. I mainly rotated in the ophthalmology department with Dr. Edward Lee who is an eye specialist since my clinical background and specialization are in ophthalmology. This was an invaluable clinical experience and exposure as I was able to witness eye surgical sessions and techniques that are not available in my clinical practice at home.

The work ethic and culture fostered during the observership emphasized professionalism, collaboration, and dedication to patient care. Participants engaged in a variety of activities throughout the day, including attending ward rounds, participating in case discussions, conducting clinical assessments, and shadowing consultants in various specialities. Additionally, structured educational sessions, such as grand rounds, journal clubs, and training workshops, were interspersed throughout the week to further enhance participants' clinical knowledge and skills.

I also participated voluntarily as an observer in the Royal College of Physicians PACES exam hosted at Epsom Hospital to learn how professional examinations are conducted in the UK.

Arranging the observership

The observership was facilitated through Martina Lagu Yanga's office, leveraging her expertise and network within the medical education community. As a participant, I communicated directly with Martina to secure my placements and organize logistics. This collaborative effort underscores the importance of mentorship and networking in accessing transformative learning opportunities. Martina's leadership and dedication played a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the observership programme.

Beyond introducing me to the specialists I rotated with Martina meticulously managed the logistical aspects of the endeavour, including arranging visas, flights, and accommodations. She ensured that all necessary visa requirements were met beforehand, navigating any potential complexities, and facilitating a smooth visa interview process. Also, Martina orchestrated my travel arrangements, liaising with airlines to secure flights that aligned with my schedule.

Martina's expertise and guidance streamlined my visa process, and her extensive networks and expertise played a pivotal role in facilitating the seamless arrangement of placements and logistics for my observership programme. Her established connections within the healthcare sector enabled her to navigate bureaucratic procedures and secure placements at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals

and ensured efficient coordination of accommodation, induction programmes, and other essential arrangements.

Without Martina's guidance and assistance, I may have encountered significant challenges navigating the complexities of securing placements and logistics independently, underscoring the importance of having a dedicated focal person with insider knowledge and networks to facilitate such endeavours effectively in the UK healthcare system.

Personal reflection on the observership

As a participant in the observership, I reflect on the profound impact of the experience on my personal and professional growth. The observership not only enhanced my clinical skills but also broadened my cultural awareness and understanding of global healthcare practices. I emphasize the importance of offering similar opportunities to South Sudanese doctors as part of their postgraduate training. Such exposure not only prepares them for the challenges of modern healthcare but also enables them to contribute meaningfully to medical advancements in their home country. The inclusion of international observerships in postgraduate training programs is vital for nurturing well-rounded and globally competent medical professionals.

Two experiences that stood out for me during my time in London were the Queen Elizabeth's funeral and the Grand Rounds sessions. The Queen's state funeral presented a unique cultural and historical experience for me, allowing me to witness a significant event in British tradition and pay my respects to the late monarch. This provided insights into ceremonial practices and cultural rituals that differ from those in my home country. In addition, participating in Grand Rounds sessions offered me the opportunity to engage with medical professionals from diverse backgrounds and exchange knowledge and perspectives on patient care and treatment approaches. These sessions highlighted similarities and differences in

medical practices between London and my home country, enriching my understanding of global healthcare systems and fostering professional growth.

Conclusion

The clinical observership experience I had in London exemplifies the significance of international collaboration in medical education and practice. Through initiatives led by visionary leaders like Martina Lagu Yanga, medical professionals worldwide, including those in South Sudan, can access transformative learning experiences that shape their careers and benefit their communities. The success of this observership underscores the importance of fostering partnerships and offering opportunities for cross-cultural exchange in the pursuit of excellence in healthcare. As we strive towards a brighter future for global healthcare, initiatives like these serve as beacons of hope, empowering doctors to make a meaningful difference in the lives of patients worldwide.

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