

ELECTIVE IN CANADA

Reporter: Gordon McKenzie, Graduate-Entry Course Year 3 Medical Student, University of Birmingham

Year of visit: 2013

Country: Canada

Region: Montreal, Quebec

Institution: Montreal General Hospital ('MGH')

Contact at destination:

Visiting student electives are organised through McGill University (http://www.medicine.mcgill.ca/ugme/electives/visiting_interapp_en.htm). Ms. Mary Cecere is the Student Affairs Coordinator and the contact for the Department of Otorhinolaryngology is Rosa Gasparrini (rosa.gasparrini@muhc.mcgill.ca). My supervisor was Dr. Karen Kost – Assistant Professor of Otorhinolaryngology and Site Director at Montreal General Hospital.

Department: Otorhinolaryngology ('ENT')

Work / Study undertaken:

All students attending an elective at one of the McGill University teaching hospitals will be matriculated as a McGill medical student for the elective period. This allows the visiting elective student to become fully involved in the team and obtain as much hands on experience as possible.

Resident led rounds start early, from anywhere between 06:45 to 08:30; however, ENT only ever had 1-3 inpatients whilst I was there! After this, the student will either attend clinics, theatre ('OR') or tumour board meetings (equivalent to MDTs). Theatre is excellent as a medical student at McGill, you are nearly always expected to scrub and are fully (often very helpfully) involved. It is very common for a medical student to suture and even learn a variety of techniques to do so at McGill. You will also be permitted to make incisions, blunt dissect, cauterise and clip etc. etc. as required!

Clinics are an excellent way to practice history taking, examination, diagnosis, presenting and formulating management plans. At McGill, students see patients on their own in small consulting rooms and, in the ENT department, are taught how to do flexible nasolaryngoscopy where indicated. Students present patients straight to the attending ('consultant'), and I found all of them were very friendly and encouraging and teach contemporaneously during the clinic.

There were plenty of other interesting events for me to attend including resident teaching, resident research day and grand rounds. I was even invited to the residents' research day meal at the McGill Faculty Club, which consisted of a four-course meal, open bar and a very pleasant atmosphere!

Description of the service and department:

The ENT department at MGH is a small, friendly department and I found myself actually attending three other hospitals depending on what was going on: the Royal Victoria Hospital, St-Mary's hospital and the Jewish General Hospital. This made my working week quite interesting and varied. A typical working day starts around 07:00 and finishes around 17:00.

Clinics consist of 4-6 small rooms equipped with all necessary ENT equipment. The ENT department shuts down at weekends and after 17:00 on weekdays with only one resident and attending taking on call emergencies. Medical students are not expected to attend on call work for ENT. Clinics get very busy and can be quite chaotic as residents (and students!) 'fight' to get their patient reviewed by the attending. OR lists start at about 7:30 and finish early afternoon. On theatre days there are afternoon post-surgical rounds.

Description of the destination:

Montreal is a vibrant city, which reminds me of a smaller London with North American and European (especially French!) influence. If there is one thing that Montreal can offer it is places to eat: there is an amazing diversity of excellent restaurants. You do not need to travel far to find French patisseries or nice places for coffee/drinks. I stayed around a popular street called Monkland where many nice places to eat, drink and snack are all found together, which becomes really busy on a sunny day. Public transport is generally very good and visiting elective students are entitled to get a student card, which saves a lot of money! There is a great mountain for a walk/jog nearby to the MGH called Mont Royal. As could be expected, there are many shops, museums and art galleries to be found to keep visitors and locals busy.

The first language of Montreal is French, but obviously a lot of English is also spoken, making it a 'bilingual' city. When you arrive in Montreal the immigration officer will greet you "bonjour-hi" and this theme remains largely throughout the city. However, this creates a fascinating environment where many other languages are also spoken. In fact, sometimes you hear one person speaking French and another speaking English in the same conversation!

Were the local people friendly?

I found the local people to be very friendly and welcoming; the UK accent is an instant give-away! The patients and various service workers that I spoke with instantly heard my accent when I spoke French and lapsed into English. They understood that I am not fluent in French and appreciated my effort. People often wanted to know what brought me to Montreal. Tourism from British and U.S.A citizens has declined over the years of the economic low, so they were pleased to meet someone visiting the city from outside Canada. I found the hospital staff and McGill medical students very approachable and friendly. They were keen to pass on tips about where to go and what to do, which was extremely helpful.

Did you feel safe and if not why not?

I felt very safe. Despite Montreal being a North American city and having its fair share of crime (like anywhere else) it is generally a very safe place to visit and live.

What did you do in your spare time?

I stayed with my Aunt and Uncle, so we went out for dinner, musical performances, hiking up Mont Sutton and Mont Royal. One of the local McGill students took me out for breakfast, and then a tour round explaining different places and highlighting good places to go with my girlfriend when she arrived after my elective. I visited Atwater Market which was nice: buy some sorbet it is the best I have ever tried! St. Catherine's Street has many shops and malls to browse around. The exchange rate was pretty poor when I visited so shopping was not really on my agenda. A visit to Old Montreal, the Biodome and Planetarium was fun. I visited St. Viateur for coffee and bagels and tried poutine (aka chips, cheese and gravy!) – a Quebec specialty. When my girlfriend arrived, we spent most of our time going to different places for lunch (cheaper than evening meals and just as good). We visited Quebec City, which was amazing. Whilst there one can go whale watching, tour the fjords of the Saguenay or visit Montmorency falls (taller than Niagara Falls). Quebec City itself is a really

nice place and Le Chateau Frontenac is a spectacular piece of architecture. We stayed in Université Laval accommodation in Quebec City, which was cheap, convenient and reminiscent of my first year university days!

Is there anything that you would particularly recommend others to do?

Ask the McGill medical students where is good to go, they'll be happy to help and might invite you out to show you around. Go to St. Viateur as it's where the locals hang out – great coffee and bagels. The Latin Quarter is also a good place to go for drinks. Definitely go to Quebec City – three hours by coach – as it's a great couple of days. We didn't get the chance, but try and go to Niagara Falls, it is a long, long journey, but it's supposed to be amazing from the Canadian side. Walk up Mont Royal for great views of the city. Lastly, try and watch the films *Bon Cop*, *Bad Cop* and *La grande séduction* as they really touch on the spirit of Quebec!

What time of the year were you there? What was the climate like?

I visited during May and early June and was very fortunate to benefit from some really nice weather. There was some rain, but it was never cold. Spring passes very quickly in Montreal. There was still a tiny bit of snow left in the mountains.

What was your accommodation like?

My accommodation was amazing as I stayed with my Aunt and Uncle! They are both expats who have been in Montreal for many years and are bilingual and know the city well. This was a huge bonus and made my stay very easy and relaxing! They also helped me with my French!

Did you enjoy your visit?

I really enjoyed my visit, so much so I was sad to leave and I am considering doing a residency at McGill, although it will be a huge bureaucratic nightmare to do so. Doing an elective in Montreal is ideal if you want hands on experience and to be pushed above and beyond what one might experience in the UK. It also offers the opportunity to work with and learn from world-class doctors and get a fantastic linguistic, cultural and social experience. Moreover, it's great to learn about and understand a different western healthcare system and it helped me to appreciate why things are done differently in the UK.

Did you find it useful medically? – in what way?

This elective was the most useful part of my medical training. Final year medical students in Quebec are equivalent to FY doctors in the UK; therefore visiting medical students are treated as such and incorporated fully into the team. I was permitted to clerk patients, perform invasive investigations and fully assist with surgery. I was also taught and expected to perform key procedures such as wax removal from ears, nose packing and wound care. Being given this responsibility allowed me to flourish, use my knowledge and learn a lot more about ENT, a career in surgery and myself. I have also prepared a case report from an interesting patient that I encountered and will submit this for peer-review soon.

If you went back would you do anything differently?

I would have stayed longer, learned more French before I visited, attended French classes whilst there and been more proactive in social networking by trying to meet with other visiting elective students. I would have visited Niagara Falls in the first week; instead of waiting until my girlfriend arrived (we didn't go in the end!).

How did you get there?

Flight from London Heathrow to Montreal Trudeau Airport. From there my Aunt and Uncle picked me up!

What was the approximate total cost?

£1,500

I must acknowledge, with thanks, the support of the Anglo-French Medical Society and Birmingham University Medical School who helped make this elective much more affordable for me.

Is there any other information that you think may be useful?

New York City is 10 hours away by train – also well worth a visit if you can!

I would be willing to provide a list of hints and tips about where to go for food, drinks etc. (provided to me by a McGill medical student). Please contact me on gordonmckenzie@hotmail.com