

ATTACHMENT TO ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL



2008

29TH DECEMBER – 2ND JANUARY

By Evelyn Wong

Alexandra Hospital Attachment

ONE WEEK STUDENT ATTACHMENT

DAY ONE | 29TH DECEMBER

NURSING DEPARTMENT

In the early morning of the 29th December, I arrived at the doorsteps of the Human Resource Department at Alexandra Hospital for my one week attachment there. Arriving at the waiting room, I was greeted by the unfamiliar faces of students with the similar interest as me to be a doctor and with the same leaning outcomes: to understand more about the life of a doctor and different departments of a hospital.

Alexandra Hospital proved to be an ideal place to kick start my journey towards becoming a medical doctor. Priding itself as an institution that puts patient care above everything, it has taught me how the healthcare industry should sometimes be seen as a service industry. The hospital aim to provide personalized service to their patients and has continuously strived to improve and redesigned their services to meet the ever-changing needs of the society. This can be seen from how they are in the forefront of geriatric care and research in Singapore's current aging society. What better way could there be for me to understand the dedication they have to patient welfare than to be introduced – on the very first day- to the department well known for their commitment to patient welfare: **the nursing department.**

There were four of us in the student attachment programme. However, on Monday, we were to attend an attachment to the nursing department with students from Meridian Junior College. We were first brought to the Auditorium where we met Senior Staff Nurse Zulkifli. He introduced us to the vision and mission of Alexandra Hospital. From his presentation, I could see how he was proud to be a staff of Alexandra Hospital. He told as that as a nurse, he had faced many challenges from his colleagues, the government and above all, from his patients. Being a male nurse, he also had to face gender

stereotypes. Yet despite all these problems, his **passion towards nursing** has never faltered. This led me to wonder if my passion to be a doctor and to help the less fortunate will be, like Nurse Zulkifli, still as strong and compelling twenty years from now. I hope that when the time comes, my calling for medicine will still remain with me.



After his presentation, Nurse Zulkifli spilt us into groups before sending us to different departments in the hospital on a rotational schedule. My group's first visit was to **Wards 2 and 3**. Those were the geriatric wards. We were first introduced to how the wards run and how the nurses have to help the patients with their daily activities like bathing or eating. Many of the patients there had lost the ability to take care of themselves independently and thus the nurses had to aid them in their daily activities. The nurses greeted us with smiles and enthusiasm. It seemed unreal that they had been already working for 5 to 6 hours. Their amicable personality and kind actions certainly created an environment suited for the recovery of the patients there.

After the wards, we were led to the Rehab center where we were shown both the **Physiotherapy Department (Sports Clinic) and the Occupational Therapy Department**. The greatest take back for me was that I was able to find out the key difference between occupational therapy and physiotherapy. While physiotherapy allows patients to regain use of their muscles, occupational therapy involves the regaining of muscle function- like the picking up of a cup. I understood while both involve helping patients regain their use of the muscles, the aims of both departments are rather different. However, their area of expertise do overlap and it is very often that both departments have to work together in order to aid the recovery of the patient. I learnt that the definition of "recovery" is complicated of many layers. Even if a patient have consumed his or her dosage of medical drug, the recovery and

rehab period is particularly important to prevent a second relapse of the initial medical problem. More importantly, as doctors, we should always aim to strive to allow the patient to go back to as familiar a life as he or she had led before the medical problem.

The last places that we visited on the first day were **Ward 11 and 13**. These wards were the surgical wards and were also the wards in which new medical technologies were tried out at. The range of patients here were very different from those that we saw at Ward 2 and 3. Also since the needs of the surgical patients were different from those in the geriatric wards, the facilities in the wards were also very different. By separating patients with different needs into the different wards, Alexandra Hospital manages to provide a more holistic period of recovery for the patient.

DAY TWO | 30TH DECEMBER

OPERATIONS

The next department that we were attached to was the **Operations** department where we met Ms Yen Tan, the Deputy Director of Operations. Upon arrival, we were each offered a packet of breakfast. The rich creamy mushroom coupled with freshly toasted bread and brewed coffee perked up our senses. Ms Yen Tan introduced us to the different sub-departments that she was in charge of. She had also asked us the aims and objectives we hope to gain upon our attachment to the operations department. I believed that the conversation was very helpful for her to plan a suitable attachment for us. At the same time, I also got to know my attachment-mates better.

The first department that we were shown to was the **call center**. There, we witnessed how calls were taken and how the operators helped the callers make and change appointments or answer their queries. We were amazed by how fast the operators worked and how they were always very amiable. I realized that there was a mirror on their desk. Upon asking the manager, I found out that the mirror was used to remind the operators to continue smiling and not get upset at any unreasonable callers. Such a method to boost the working environment was definitely significant in ensuring that the callers receive the best service. Regardless of how small the call center was, I realized that it played a much bigger role than in comparison to the physical space it was in. I learnt that in order to promote a

hospital which put the patient's welfare first, an efficient workforce of healthcare personnel is essential but we should never forget those who were in the back scene.

After the call center, we were brought to the **clinics**. There were numerous clinics within the Alexandra Hospital complex which caters to different specialties. We were brought to Clinic J and K. Clinic J dealt with more medical conditions like Anesthesia, Cardiology, Generalized Medicine and Neurology to name a few. The clinics were very patient-friendly with self-use blood pressure machines as well as a hand phone charging area. We were brought into the blood taking area where we were introduced to the different vials with different colored caps on them to indicate the different tests required. In clinic K however, the services there were different and more specialized. They saw breast surgery cases, Trauma cases, joint replacement cases and gastrointestinal cases to name a few. Since the patients who were to Clinic K were mostly patients who had undergone a surgery, the clinic rooms were all full furnished with ultrasound machines to check their recovery process. I learnt that in order for the clinics to run smoothly, some order is necessary.



The next department we were asked to go to was the **kitchen**. We were each given a package of lunch from the different menus. We were then given a form each where we conducted an evaluation of the food that was given to us. The uniqueness of such a lunch experience allowed us to bond as a team. Most importantly, it shed light into how Alexandra Hospital aims to provide the best care for their patients in every detailed manner, even to how their food is being served. I believe that food is vital towards a patient's recovery.

After lunch, we were split into two groups. I had the opportunity to be attached to the **porter services**. It was very enlightening to see how this group of personnel functions and how their role in the hospital is undermined. They are the people who ferry the patients in and out of their wards, making sure that they are at the surgery room on time. Without them, there would be little order in the surgery and recovery wards. I realized that most of the porters were of an elderly age as well. It was a clear representation of how just because they are old, it does not mean that they are unable to work.

The last department that we were attached to on that day was the **pharmacy**. Before we started visiting the different clinics, we were introduced to the job scope of a pharmacist. I realized that the work scope of a pharmacist is very different from my previous impression of it. While distributing medicine at the clinic is part of the job scope, they also have a variety of duties like ensuring that the medicines the doctors prescribe do not have antagonistic effects on each other. In addition, they are also the people who separate and allocate the proper medicine to the patients at the ward. There was also a pharmacist in one of the clinic in charge to distributing warfarin medicine to the patients with heart problems. The wide range of skills a pharmacist needs allow me to understand how challenging the path of healthcare is.

DAY THREE | 31TH DECEMBER

DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE

On Day Three, we were attached to the **Department of Emergency Medicine**. Arriving in the morning, we met up with Sister Pang Ai Cheen, the Senior Staff nurse running the Department of Emergency Medicine. She brought us into the department and showed us all the different stations there. She also explained to us how patients are registered and seen for consultation. I was fascinated by how Alexandra hospital used a computerized system to categorize and arrange the patients according to the level of pain they are in. For the patients who are in more severe pain, they are brought into an area where they are given immediate medical attention. Such a system allowed the doctors to sieve through the patients and target the more serious cases first. I believe that this system allows the A&E department to be run with more discipline and order. It also furthers Alexandra Hospital's vision to provide the best hospital care to cater to each patient's individual needs.

I was fortunate enough to be attached to **Dr Andrew Tang** who was the Medical Officer in the A&E Department. He was in charge of the more severe cases. There, I witness a variety of cases from a bee sting to a broken leg as well as appendicitis. I also witnessed a range of treatments and medical procedures administered from blood taking to injections and IV drips as well as stitching of lacerations. Dr Tang proved to be a great mentor as he answered my questions with much patience. In addition, he would print out additional information after each case for me to read up at home. I am sincerely grateful for his time amidst the busy situation at the A&E Department. The amount of enthusiasm and warmth he eluded as he greeted every patient is vital in the type of doctor I aspire to be.

After a hectic day at the A&E Department, I had the opportunity to converse with **Sister Pang**. She shared with us her experience working the A&E Department as well as the challenges that she had to face. From the way she talked, I could hear her passion towards nursing. She told us that even though she finds her patients to be her greatest reward, they are also her greatest challenges. She shared with us experiences of being shouted at by the patient's family or being emotionally distraught after telling a patient's death to his or her family. I learnt that the art of healthcare is not just a simple diagnosis or prognosis. On top of the clinical challenges, one will also have to learn how to control one's emotion. To treat a patient, we should not only look into the physical conditions of the patient but to understand patient behavior and reasoning so as to provide a holistic treatment. I believe that my interest towards patient care will be strong enough so that thirty to forty years from now, I will be like the nurses and patients I aspire to be: dedicated and commitment to their line of work.

DAY FOUR | 2ND DECEMBER

SURGERY DEPARTMENT

The 2nd of December was the last day of my attachment at Alexandra Hospital. I was attached to the Surgery Department. Early in the morning, we made our way towards ward 13 where I met up with Dr. Thant Zin. I was first brought given a list of patients under their team, Team 3. The list contains the name of the patient, their prognosis as well as if they were to have a surgery that day. As I accompanied the doctors on their rounds, I realized that they had a lot of patients under their care. In order to complete all their rounds and surgeries for the day, they had to be quick on their rounds. Even

though they were pressed for time, they had to treat each patient with detailed care and to make sure that they did not overlook any new or pre-existing condition of the patient. I witnessed how the doctors had to be quick on their feet and accurate in their diagnosis and treatment.



After making the rounds with the doctors, we were brought into the operating theatre. We were given operating clothes to don on and we were brought into the theatre itself where we witnessed surgery on a patient suffering from parastomal hernia. It was an eye-opening experience as we witnessed firsthand how the surgeon skillfully operated on the patient. Even though I could not understand the procedure in detail, however, I managed to see how it is important for the surgeon to have a steady hand and to remain calm and collective in the operation when there was a change in procedure due to unexpected circumstances.

The second operation which we witnessed after lunch was on a patient suffering from piles. This operation however was done by a house officer under Dr. Thant Zin: Dr Andrew. He was telling us how he had only slept for one hour the night before. The life of a surgeon is very tiring for not only does their job require them to be alert and clam, they do not have regular sleeping hours. Their commitment level is also very high and the demands of their job are just as challenging. During this operation, my fellow attachment-mate and I had the opportunity to suit up for the operation. We were taught the seven steps behind washing our hands and were given instructions before we donned on the sterile suits. I realized that the act of sterilizing ourselves require much patience and speed. The process itself is very long and hence in order to start and finish the operations on time, speed is definitely crucial however, quality and effectiveness still sat on top of the priority list.

In the afternoon, we were attached to two Medical Officers: Dr Paul Tan and his colleague. It was a surprising coincidence where my attachment-mate and I found out that Dr Tan's colleague was my

senior (Hwachong Alumnus) while Dr Paul Tan was the brother of my attachment-mate's friend. They briefed us about the workflow and told us that they were in charge of extracting sebaceous cysts from the patients. They shared with us their life in Medical School as well as how their lives have changed working in the hospital. They were more than happy to let us know more about the procedure that they were doing and to share with us the differences between procedures under general anaesthesia (GA) and local anaesthesia (LA). At the operating theatre, we were also fortunate enough to converse with Dr. Wong Her Shann, an anaesthetist in the operating theatre. He shared with us his experiences in medical school and informed us of the long journey in the healthcare industry. He told us that as a doctor, we will have to continuously be tested and learn about new technologies and inventions. While it is tiring, I believe that such a working atmosphere will satisfy my interest in life-long learning.

CONCLUSION

My attachment to Alexandra Hospital is an experience that I am very grateful for. The amount of exposure and knowledge I was given and taught definitely opened up my understanding of the healthcare industry and taught me things that I would never been able to learn in school. From my firsthand experience in the operating theatre and from my conversations with the doctors, I understand the challenges that I were to face should I pursue my aspiration to be a doctor. While the prospect of leading such a tiring lifestyle does frighten me a little, however, after my stint with Alexandra Hospital, I am confident that my passion and interest towards Medicine will not waver. I thank Alexandra Hospital for this well-planned attachment. It has taught me how a hospital operate, how different departments in the hospital contribute towards the effective running of a hospital and above all, it showed me how the healthcare industry is truly a service industry where patience, dedication and passion are vital.