Participating in an international rotation was one of the most exciting and intriguing ways I was able to learn during medical school. The whole experience is just something that I will never forget. Insanely long airplane rides to being the only American in a room full of residents waiting to be pointed at to answer questions about the topics on hand, it was well worth it. I happened to go to New Zealand for my international rotation and I was assigned plastic surgery for the month. Plastic surgery was not performed at the Auckland University Hospitals but at Middlemore Hospital, which was about a 20-minute train ride south of Auckland. Luckily, the house I and a few other students lived in, I was able to walk about 10 minutes then snag the train and it made for a relaxing pre and post work ride. Our house was located near New Market, which is a small, but active side town of Auckland full of restaurants, shopping and basically anything you could need. It worked out really well, especially for my peers who only had about a ten-minute walk to Auckland University Hospitals right up the road. I could not be happier that I chose to travel to New Zealand.

I was most interested in how New Zealand’s healthcare would differ from our own here in the states. In New Zealand, one of my preceptors, Dr. Locke, had quite a bit of information regarding how the healthcare system works there. First off, New Zealand is a socialist country, which means that there is a range of economic and social systems characterized by social ownership and democratic control of the means of production; as well as the political ideologies, theories, and movements that aim at their establishment. Basically what this boils down to for the healthcare system is that everyone is provided healthcare. However, there are still many companies providing private insurance for
those who wish to have their own private insurance as opposed to the governments. Now, the healthcare provided by the government is free, but there are of course some drawbacks and keep in mind, all workers in New Zealand are heavily taxed, so that all may benefit and prosper. With that said, healthcare provided by the government tends to be extremely behind, with wait times of weeks to even 6 months to see certain doctors or have surgeries performed. And of course, to be eligible to have your surgery performed you have to meet certain requirements. Lets say that you could benefit from a knee replacement, in order for that knee to be replaced by the government, that knee has to have a number of characteristics before it will be put on the list. So although you could use a knee replacement now, and you are in pain, it may not be severe enough to be covered by the government and you would have to wait, whether that be months or years for your knee to deteriorate in order to meet the criteria. You can see why that may not be in your best interest, especially in today’s world where people want things quickly. The benefits for having private insurance, aside from the governments is that the physicians who have their own private practices can accommodate you much quicker. Of course, this is extra money out of your pocket though.

Another interesting healthcare policy implemented in New Zealand is the ACC, or Accident Compensation Corporation, which provides comprehensive, no-fault, personal injury cover for all the New Zealand residents and visitors to New Zealand. This program helps people get back on their feet and back to work. It will even cover the costs of recovery related treatments such as physical therapy, transport, home health, residential nursing care and help with your children. This was interesting to me as it is a program
that basically does exactly what it says it does. If I fell and broke my leg, I would be completely covered under the ACC to have my leg repaired and appropriate rehabilitation therapy after treatment. To me, that is pretty unique but it helps New Zealand stay hustling and bustling even when accidents happen. Writing this reminds me of being attacked by a Titan triggerfish while scuba diving the Great Barrier Reef. It attacked my out of nowhere as they are very territorial fish that can grow several feet in size and are known to attack divers and ram them as well knocking dives unconscious. Luckily for me, this one just used its sharp teeth and ripped my ear up and bit me several times on the head and arms. But I ended up needing my ear sutured and I was wishing Australia had an accident care coverage policy similar to New Zealand. I was lucky enough to be a medical student and the doc sutured my ear up and told me to skedaddle so it worked out in the end.

Blogs:

February 2\textsuperscript{nd}.

My first day traveling to Middlemore was rather hectic. I was lucky enough to be assigned there with another medical student from Sweden, so we were able to make our way from Auckland University to Middlemore together. We managed to find the train downtown and then had to purchase our HOP cards, which had money on them to ride the train. A nice gentleman told us which train we needed to get on and we got on. It was already noon by then and I didn’t bring any food of course so I was starving. Twenty-three minutes later we arrived at the hospital, which has, it’s own stop. We navigated around the hospital to find our coordinator and received our badges to have access to the
operating theatres that we call the operating rooms of course. We then went to find our preceptors. The hospital is made up of many different buildings, some with and without air conditioning. I found a resident and let them know who I was and a few minutes later I was off to clinic for the remainder of the afternoon. She was nice enough to buy me lunch as they have an unlimited supply of funds for food while at the hospital. I wish we had that! It was an exciting day and that is when I met Dr. Locke who I really liked working with. It took me about an hour to get home from the clinic location via shuttle back to Middlemore then the train back home and the 10-minute walk. It was a long day but I am excited for the rest of the trip.

February 6th.

Made it through the week! Met some really cool people and today we went to an absolutely unbelievably beautiful beach called Karekare Beach. We rented a car for the four of us and drove to the west side of Auckland to the coast and it was just an amazing ride. Driving in New Zealand is opposite from the states so it was an extra challenge that made driving fun! Not to mention the roads are as wide as some of our sidewalks! And the locals drive a million miles an hour on them! To get to the beach we had to wade through a little river and came upon a black sand beach with nobody on it but us! It was so beautiful with beautiful blue water and decent-sized waves. I wish I had a surfboard so bad! Good day though!

The most exciting surgery I got to help with was a man who had suffered bells palsy and had a droopy face on one side. So we got to take a portion of his tensor fascia
Hunter Wasserman New Zealand, Middlemore Hospital 2016

latae from his leg and made a sling in his face to pull it up. It was neat to see a full neck
dissection as well. Really though, I thought the most profound experience was how
similar surgery is to the states. I didn’t expect it to be different as we all read the same
literature, so I guess I just confirmed my assumption.

Culturally, I just loved how laid back the work atmosphere was. And don’t think
I’m lazy, but it was completely different from how we go through our surgery days here
in the states. First we would see our patients in the morning after handoff, then we would
all go get a coffee and breakfast together as a team, and sit together talking about the
news or any cases we had coming up (this is unheard of in the surgery field in the
states!!!). Then we would start our morning cases and then most of the time we all got
lunch together as well. It was the best surgery month ever! Eating and actually taking a
minute to breathe with the team you were with all day really made it a fun experience. I
felt more involved and “in” with the group. It was wonderful.

This experience gave me insight to how the world can be much different from the
one we have created around ourselves at home. It also shows how similar people and
medicine can be, too. Being in a new environment and familiarizing yourself is a process
but it is an exciting one and makes me want to travel even more to experience more
cultural difference and learn new tips and tricks from individuals you never would have
encountered if you hadn’t. I was most impressed with the team/family based approach to
medicine and will do my best to make sure everyone on my team is taken care of so that
they may provide the best care to their patients.