

Doctors in Training Grant

FINAL REPORT



Listening hard in Parasitology class

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Diploma of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene

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From September to December of 2019, I undertook the post-graduate study of a Diploma in Tropical Medicine & Hygiene (DTM&H) at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) in London, United Kingdom. It was a three-month, full-time intensive university course aimed at developing professional competence in not only tropical medicine, infectious diseases and public health, but also extended to equipping clinicians with the skills and knowledge to work effectively in lower and middle income countries and poorly resourced settings.

The course ran from the school in Bloomsbury, central London, which hosted students from 120 countries around the world. Albeit clear that London itself is not a hotspot for tropical diseases, the school is one of the major centres for research and education in global and public health, and the base for many worldwide collaborations.

LSHTM is a world leader in providing advanced training and interdisciplinary research for clinicians, future academics, policy makers and researchers worldwide. It has an astounding reputation for its high standard of teaching.

The course had a demanding teaching schedule with 248 lectures across a three-month period organised by the inimitable course director Professor David Moore. These lectures were interspersed with small group teaching sessions and laboratory work. Many of us feared the dreaded microscopes at the start and searched hopelessly for the power button, not having used one since first year medical school. But with outstanding guidance and patient teaching, by the end we were able to diagnose numerous parasites on tissue and faecal smears, malaria on thick and thin films whilst differentiating species and staging, as well as a heavy emphasis on entomology. At the course conclusion we sat three examinations covering tropical medicine, public health and parasitology, before these examination papers were hastily marked in the name of timely graduation (the next day) in the Keppel Street courtyard and the End of Year DTM&H party, a real highlight.

In the name of balance, the class social calendar was heaving with adventures and spectacles. There was no chance I would come out of the other end without lifelong friends, as apart from spending nine hours a day together, we had five nights of orientation events in our first week, before seeing every aspect London had to offer. Pub Wednesdays, Pump Handle Bar Fridays, Saturday Park Runs, if you named a London event in that three month period, the DTM&H class would be there. The school itself ran an exceptional schedule of seminars and panel discussions, and it was incredibly inspiring to hear from the film-makers of some of the most influential documentaries in the past few years, as well as leaders in Global and Public Health talking about the latest breakthroughs in their fields.

For a city so immense, it was wonderful to experience London with new and old souls. The legendary Professor David Mabey hosts the Annual Diploma and Sports Day Party at his beautiful abode in Blackheath, where the fierce international rivalries came out into full flight in the form of 'football', rounders, tennis and table tennis accompanied by many of the world's finest foods and brews brought by the DTM&H class.

There were a multitude of reasons I applied for the diploma. After completing my internship and first year of physician training at a major tertiary hospital in Melbourne, I then spent the first six months of 2019 working as a Senior Resident Medical Officer in Alice Springs Hospital. Working in Central Australia had a seismic impact upon me. Alice Springs, albeit not tropical, is the major centre of an incredibly remote geographical expanse of Australia where infectious diseases of the developing world such as Rheumatic Heart Disease, trachoma and scabies affect so many lives of Aboriginal Australians, despite having been long since eradicated in Australia's urban sprawls. I became exceedingly aware of the lack of consultation and autonomy that continues to affect Indigenous Communities, and the mistrust and fear that adds to the many barriers to access to healthcare for the First Nation people.

Yet this experience spelled out to me the poignancy of tenacity and optimism of the Australian Indigenous people, and I recognised how much I was driven by the human rights dimension of infectious and tropical diseases. These are conditions that are often a reflection of the sociocultural environment in which these patients inhabit, and it truly is an inequitable world where many of these preventable diseases blight lives and communities, not only in Australia but the world over. As such, my frustration at this disparity in health led me to apply for the DTM&H in the desire to expand my knowledge of public health and diseases which are not only preventable but have huge societal and economical repercussions. Numerous fellow doctors who I admired spoke so highly of the Diploma and of its immense impact on them as people and clinicians that I knew it was not an opportunity I would want to pass up.

In our cohort of 95 other doctors, we ranged from PGY3 doctors like myself up to fully fledged physicians, professors, doctors with over 30 years' experience up their sleeve across many specialties. One of the great beauties of this course is that the usual hospital hierarchies that dictate many of our interactions in hospitals dissipate. Instead, we were colleagues and friends with a common goal despite being from all over the world. The diploma attracts very like-minded individuals who thrive on new experiences and adventures, and who possess a great curiosity and humility in their dedication to social justice.

I learnt from and interacted with some of the most inspiring clinicians, scientists, and leaders in the field. Their experience ranged from the United Nations, World Health Organisation, Chief Medical Officer of the United Kingdom to those involved in working in the frontline in tropical countries, at Médecins Sans Frontières and the cutting edge of medical research.

These determined individuals showed a superhuman dedication to the task of growing with a world that will face the impacts of climate change on the social and environmental determinants of health. The diploma provided me with an extraordinary network with mentors who continue to influence me personally and professionally.

Additionally, the DTM&H drastically enhanced my understanding of the challenges of clinical practice in resource-poor settings, strengthened my epidemiological and clinical skills, and improved my knowledge of public health strategies, health systems, and the latest advances in areas of diagnosis, treatment and microbiology. It is difficult to describe what effect having such grand exposure from the world leaders in their fields has had on me, and interacting with the incredible minds and hearts of both the teachers and peers in my course has taught me about what I can aspire to achieve.

These themes were all interspersed with comprehensive teaching about major tropical diseases, refugee health, Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) and the ever more prevalent Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). The diploma had a strong global health focus on the development of crisis management, leadership, skills in research design, implementation, and data management in providing healthcare in conflict and warzones. We all undertook a week-long intensive on critical analysis of research papers and learning to design robust projects in the future. I now feel much more adept at comparing and contrasting the management of infectious diseases in diverse contexts and to critically evaluate the evidence for health interventions in resource-limited settings.

In terms of my path from here, I aim to become a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Physicians, specialising in Infectious Diseases, a specialisation for which this Diploma is fundamental and will allow me to continue working and training in diverse locations around Australia and the world, further building a broad base of skills and experiences and allowing me to provide meaningful benefit to not only my hospital colleagues but the communities I work in. Additionally, I wish to return to the LSHTM in the future to undertake a Masters of Tropical Medicine and International Health. This would involve formulating a Masters project abroad, which would ideally harness medical education skills while focussing on the components of health campaigns designed to improve health literacy.



1. Extracting teeth workshop: more about the push than the pull
2. Panel discussion with the filmmakers of the Syrian documentary 'For Sama' – an intense and emotional must-watch
3. The formidable and excellent Prof Dave Moore giving us desperately needed exam tips

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Since my return to Australia, I have been incessantly encouraging fellow doctors to consider this diploma in the future, being such a great opening to the world. As we know, the health landscape in Australia and the world is changing. A doctor in infectious diseases, tropical medicine and public health needs to be dedicated to expanding her skill set, and really is faced with opportunity to make a difference.

I hope to act as a means of enabling that to happen and to foster confidence in our health system particularly amongst Aboriginal Australians and those living remotely, in the hopes of working towards providing an equitable health system for all Australians. My three months of intensive and immersive learning at LSHTM, the knowledge and experience gained, will have a lasting impact on my career, and I cannot thank MIGA enough for helping to make this possible.



1. First grand day outside the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, in Keppel Street, Bloomsbury – The student heart of London
2. The Tower Bridge – Featured in many a great movie
3. On the front steps of the school after finishing out last tough Parasitology and Entomology exam

Each year MIGA's Doctors in Training Grants Program offers six Grants of \$10,000 to assist doctors in training whilst pursuing advanced training opportunities. Many different training types are eligible - visit our website to find out more and to apply.

If you're interested in applying for our DIT Grants Program, you must have medical indemnity insurance with MIGA. Thankfully, obtaining cover with MIGA is quick and easy using our Online Application Form. We recognise that your insurance needs change throughout your career, and offer different levels of policy cover for each career stage.

If you have any questions, simply contact our expert team.

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