

## Lauren Smith Impressions 2014-5

The two months that I spent at the Children's Surgical Centre (CSC) in Phnom Penh changed my perspective of medicine and taught me more than I ever thought possible in such a short time. I saw pathology that I would never have the chance to see at home. I also saw common pathologies through a new perspective, which no doubt enhanced my knowledge and broadened my ability to manage cases in Australia. However the exposure to disease and how it is dealt with in Cambodia was not the area in which I learnt the most. Working with limited resources, effective leadership, decision making skills, the necessity of continuing education, and the politics of international aid were all areas that I felt my elective benefited immensely. I also gained an appreciation for the culture of medicine in Australia.

Cambodia has faced immense challenges over the last several decades. The genocide perpetrated by the Pol Pot regime targeted the educated, leaving a medical system which is still heavily reliant on international aid today. CSC has been in operation for over 16 years, offering free care to poor Cambodians and training Khmer staff. In the two months I was there, there were at least five international teams that came to assist through operating and training. The centre takes maxillofacial, burns, reconstructive plastics, ENT, ophthalmology, and complicated orthopaedics cases. They also facilitate other specialist cases when international volunteer surgeons are available.

The most challenging aspect of my elective was coming to terms with some of the unexpected cultural



*This is Chan Pov, a patient who I took a special interest in and who gave me permission to share his story. He had a very rare tumour, causing large masses that infiltrated his skull. A Japanese neurovascular surgeon operated on him twice while I was at CSC. This photo was taken the morning after the second operation, though Chan Pov was still very ill. His gratitude was moving.*

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phenomena in Cambodia. It was also difficult to see cases that could have been prevented if they presented earlier, or which would be treatable in Australia but not Cambodia. Certainly I was filled with frustration with how little I could contribute as a student, and this renewed my vigor to study medicine, that I may be more helpful the next time I go.



*The staff at morning meeting*

During my time in CSC I got to know many of the staff and appreciate how hard they work and how desperate they are to make their country better. The doctors work long hours and often train overseas away from their families, many of the scrub nurses are at medical school on the weekend, and yet they went out of their way to include me in patient care and make sure I got

to see other parts of the country while I was there. I would highly recommend this placement to anyone interested in surgery and international medical aid.

I am extremely grateful to the Jackson family for making my elective experience possible through the Dr Carl Richard Jackson Scholarship. This family's generosity and commitment to Cambodia has provided me with an invaluable medical education.