Your elective is likely to be one of the highlights of your medical training. Most medical schools will let you go almost anywhere and pursue any medical interest.

The Electives Network (TEN) helps you find your dream placement, whether that is working in a medical outpost deep in a tropical jungle or supporting world-experts with their research.

This guide is your starting point to a safe, thrilling and memorable experience, whatever you decide to do.
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Where to start...

Right here, right now. The Electives Network is one of the most comprehensive medical elective databases in existence, so our site is a good place to start. We have details of hundreds of hospitals and elective placements in more than 140 countries.

Our Country Profiles, Case Studies, and Blog Reports are there to give you some ideas about where to go. And if you already know, search our database for existing student reports.

If you’re not sure a hospital placement is right for you then try the ‘Something Different’ section on the site which gives details about other types of elective. Think NASA, research institutes, prisons or mobile clinics as just some ideas.

How to apply...

Early! Competition is extremely high, waiting lists can be long and communication can be slow in remote parts of the world.

Dr Who?
Check the hospital website for a contact name and formal elective application process. This may involve a form of payment. If the hospital has no specific application process, take a look at our regularly updated hospital database. If no specific contact name is known, we suggest you address correspondence to either 'The Medical Superintendent' (for hospitals in the developing world), the Electives Coordinator (for most medical schools) or the Chief Medical Officer (Australia/NZ hospitals).
**Short and sweet**

Make initial contact with a short letter and CV. If possible write in the recipient’s language. Google Translate is a useful translation tool. Keep your text clear and to the point, preferably less than one side of A4, covering the following points:

- The dates of your elective
- What you want to get out of your time
- What stage of training you are at
- Where you are studying
- How you heard about the placement
- Highlight all your contact details including email
- Enclose formal proof of your status as a medical student

Replies may be slow, but persevere. Follow up with an email if necessary but keep any attachments to a minimum file size.

**Congratulations - you’re in, but what happens now...**

Plans become reality. First things first, do you have clear written confirmation of your elective placement? We’ve heard several stories of students confirming their placements over the phone and then arriving to find the hospital is not expecting them.

In the weeks before departure, it’s worth re-confirming your arrival with the hospital. Electives do fall through from time-to-time. Don’t panic. Have a back-up in mind and if something like this happens, let us know and we’ll see if we can help.
Finding the funds…

Take a look at our database of country specific funding options for ideas of ways to avoid breaking into your savings or taking out more student loans.

Draw up a list of expenses for your trip and work out a budget including all possible expenditures.

The following checklist gives you an idea of where the bulk of cash will go:

1. Flights
2. Accommodation
3. Food
4. Immunisations
5. Equipment - (rucksack, clothes, etc.)
6. First Aid Kit
7. Map(s) and Guide book(s)
8. Transport
9. Travel insurance
10. Specialist Medical Travel Insurance
11. Visa (if applicable)
12. Communications (mobile, laptop, phone cards, etc.)

Apply, apply, apply…

Apply to as many places as you can think of and make your application stand out. Some places we think are worth contacting for financial support:

- First stop … your medical school
- Our database for grants, awards and scholarships
- Banks
- Charities
- Pharmaceutical companies
- Local businesses
- Religious organisations
- Specialist job agencies for part-time work
Include a summary of your trip expenses, CV, and if possible an academic reference. If you have a specific purpose to your elective, like research or pilot projects, you are in a better fund-raising position. Where appropriate demonstrate how your elective is relevant to the organisation you’re applying to.

If you don’t ask, you don’t get.

Preparing for take-off…


Before you buy, ask:

- What restrictions are there on your ticket?
- Are you able to change the departure and/or return dates?
- Is there a cost and can it be done on-line? If not, where?
- What are the availability prospects if you do decide to change your dates of travel?
- What will it cost to cancel your ticket?

Get cover

**IMPORTANT:** Specialist Medical Elective Travel Insurance

As you’ll be working in a medical establishment, it is VITAL that you also take out specialist medical travel insurance to cover you when working. You need an extremely comprehensive travel care insurance package.

If planning to drive while abroad, you should check that your insurance policy covers you for medical expenses in the event of an accident.

It’s imperative you have medical elective travel insurance before going on an elective. Getting the correct policy to suit your needs can be difficult. The most common mistake is to purchase insurance that doesn’t cover you while you’re working in a hospital.
Before you buy, ask if the following are covered:

- Cancellation for exam resits
- Portable medical equipment
- Emergency medical biological fluids
- Personal Accident needle-stick injury
- Loss of money or passport
- Loss of luggage
- Delays, cancellations and missed departures
- Personal and legal liabilities as detailed in the policy
- Personal accident
- Money Back Guarantee?
- Driving abroad? Does the policy cover you for medical expenses in the event of an accident?
- If you’re planning to do any semi-extreme or extreme sports, can cover be extended to include these?

And worth a mention:

- A fully-worded written policy is required before purchasing the cover. Read this policy very carefully for limitations on age, country, activities (particularly with reference to your medical work), and the dates of your cover
- Check that that the claims procedure is clear and well defined, make a note of the contact details in case you need them abroad and give a copy to someone at home
- Ensure that the cover is started a week or so prior to your departure so that cancellation and curtailment will be covered
- You’ll be working in a medical establishment, faced with all sorts of unknown situations which most insurers don’t cover. Where possible we recommend you take out specialist medical elective travel insurance. Check out the ‘Insurance Section’ of our site for further details

**Professional Insurance**

Going on your elective is your first opportunity to really put into practice the knowledge and skills you’ve learned over the last few years.

In doing so you’re bound to come across circumstances and situations which are a medico legal minefield, as well as a clinical challenge. You need to access the
best possible professional protection from the many providers available to you.

In general terms, if you stay within the limits of your knowledge and experience during an elective abroad it is unlikely that you will encounter any legal or medico-legal problems. If, however, you do become involved in a situation involving a medical complaint or negligence, notify your provider as soon as possible.

Money, money, money
Generally, there are three main ways to carry money with you on your elective: cash, traveler's cheques, and credit and/or debit cards.

We believe that it is not a good idea to rely on only one of these methods and suggest you carry a combination of all three.

Check your travel guide, ask at a foreign exchange, or talk to your bank for advice on the best forms of money to take with you. (And when talking to your bank inform them of your travel plans so they don’t cancel your cards unexpectedly).

Check it out
Download TEN’s extensive checklist here. Not everything will be relevant to everyone, and there may be things you’ll want to take which we’ve missed, but it’s a cracking place to start.

Not on the list but should be considered if…

…you’re heading to a developing country, you could check with your elective host to see if you can bring anything for them. Copies of old edition medical textbooks may be highly valued.

…you’re taking unusual medications with you, we advise you to get a doctor’s letter stating that what you have with you is medically required. You should check any legality issues as medicine supply laws can vary extensively from country to country.

Download TEN’s extensive checklist here.
Healthy mind, healthy body

Working in healthcare in a foreign country has its own set of risks so be aware and be prepared. Specific health advice for medical volunteers is provided by the International Medical Volunteers Association - IMVA (www.imva.org/Pages/persfrm.htm) and we recommend that you take a look at their advice.

Travel vaccination

- General vaccination requirements for individual countries should be provided by your occupational health department, doctor, and/or host hospital
- Some countries will require vaccination records in order to process your visa so make this one of your first planning priorities. Visit your doctor or nurse about eight weeks before your departure. Use the country specific guide to your required vaccinations on the CDC website (www.nc.cdc.gov/travel)

What to expect while away from home

Working and living conditions experienced by elective students vary considerably across the world. Some students arrive totally unprepared and find the situation overwhelming. With a bit of forward planning, research into the culture and flexibility you should be able to enjoy an unforgettable elective experience.

An element of danger

Although the majority of elective assignments are safe, we strongly advise you to investigate potential risks before you commit yourself to a placement. Find out the current situation regarding accidents, disease, terrorism, political unrest, and war. The Foreign Office www.fco.gov.uk provides information on current threats and travel restrictions. Road traffic accidents are by far the biggest source of serious danger. Choosing to work in areas of low crime and political stability can substantially reduce risks.
Great expectations

Be realistic about your expectations of the working conditions:

- Patients, even if seriously ill, may not be able to be seen by a doctor because of huge demand
- Not all illnesses may be treated to the standards you might anticipate
- Equipment and supplies may be limited and often inadequate
- Families may be expected to provide meals, bedding, and basic supplies such as syringes, medications, etc
- You may feel totally out of your depth and ineffective for a while. It takes time to gain confidence and expertise

Where health care is scarce, health care personnel often need to be extremely innovative in the way in which they work in order to provide effective care. In addition, many health care workers may find themselves performing tasks that they are not specifically trained to do, simply out of necessity. You should be prepared to take on new duties and use makeshift equipment or existing equipment in new ways, but all times keeping in mind the boundaries of your ability.

There is often a big difference in the way you are treated as a medical student abroad in contrast with your time as a medical student in your home country and this in turn can lead to problems. It is important that your elective is well structured and supervised, as poor supervision can place you in ethically and legally difficult situations. Even if you are working in a hectic hospital in a poor country where healthcare provision is scarce, you should not take on the role of a qualified doctor.

You are strongly recommended not to prescribe, or treat patients without some supervision. It is also ethically important that patients know that you are a medical student and that you are not able to take full responsibility for their diagnosis and treatment.
The unexpected
Even the best laid plans can’t predict when things will go wrong, but you can have certain measures in place in case of emergencies.

Before you travel
• Email/fax your contact details and itinerary to the relevant Embassy at your destination
• Leave a copy of your itinerary with family and your university
• Know who the best contact is at your Embassy and ensure you have their correct details

While you travel
We recommend keeping the following information with you at all times:
• All contact details for your host hospital
• Contact details for your nearest Embassy
• A copy of your passport and travel insurance policy
• Contact details for the elective coordinators at your medical school
• Your lost traveler’s cheque or bank card help-line number

Problematic placements
Unbearable working conditions, too much or not enough responsibility, and no support, care or attention can make for a miserable experience. To continue your elective at another hospital:
• Contact your embassy and/or medical school for other medical contacts
• Search the Electives Network database for nearby hospitals and contacts

And please let us know about your experience so others can be forewarned.
Recording your experiences

You’re bound to have medical experiences on your elective unlike any you have had before. Photos and journals will make reports and professional articles once home much easier.

Please only take photos of people, particularly in a medical setting, if they are happy for you to do so. Certain cultures and religions, for example, can take great offence at having their photo taken. Similarly check the legality of photography in public places as some countries have strict restrictions on the photographing of public buildings.

Finally, we hope you’ll come back and tell us how it was for you. Your feedback is invaluable and will help future students. Please get in touch to update us on experiences, tell us to feature other specialist areas or just look at the photos.

From all the Electives Network team, have a safe and fantastic trip.