

Healthcare Science in a remote location: STP elective to Shetland, Scotland

By Angela Ballantyne

I am an STP biochemistry trainee based at the Luton and Dunstable hospital a busy urban area ca. 30 miles from London and to maximise my elective experience I decided to experience healthcare science in a remote and rural location. Thus, I undertook a 4 week elective in May 2014 on the Shetland Isles, an archipelago in the North Sea located between Scotland and Norway. My base was the only hospital in Shetland, the Gilbert Bain Hospital where I rotated around the three specialist laboratories (biochemistry, microbiology and haematology and blood transfusion) to get an experience of how the pathology department functioned. My main project was to carry out a laboratory comparison of the quality management systems and the business continuity plans of my 'home' hospital in Luton and the Gilbert Bain. I gave some tutorial sessions during my time at the Gilbert Bain which was a good opportunity to research topics I wasn't familiar with and hopefully gave something back to the staff there. I also got the chance to observe a multidisciplinary ward round which considered every inpatient in the hospital!

My elective exposed me to the challenges of working in a remote location with few members of staff and no clinical scientist advice available on site. A full quality management system is required in Shetland but with less staff available to implement it. My laboratory comparison also showed me the difficulties faced in maintaining business continuity in a rural location. The experience of my elective has broadened my understanding of the issues faced by other laboratories and that few samples do not mean few problems!