Scars and Stories: A Patchwork of Care, Culture, and Compassion at B. J. Wadia Hospital

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Background

B.J. Wadia Hospital, India's oldest pediatric hospital, offers specialized care to Mumbai's underserved communities. The Burns & Plastics Dept handles clefts, wounds & complex reconstructions, delivering high-quality care in a resource-limited setting. This environment offers a transformative learning experience blending clinical skills, resilience, & adaptability in a global health context.

Objectives

- Hands-on experience in pediatric plastic surgery and burn care
- Gain exposure to patient care in resource-limited settings
- Learning culturally responsive patient care
- Exposure to global healthcare delivery
- Building adaptability in complex cases



Introduction

This one month travel experience at B.J. Wadia Hospital in Mumbai, India, in June 2024, was a unique global health exchange focused on understanding pediatric plastic and burn surgery in a resource-limited setting. The purpose of this travelog is to document insights gained about healthcare delivery, cultural exchange, and professional development within a context of limited resources. Through in-hospital shadowing, rotating in the plastics and burns departments, and engaging in discussions with local healthcare professionals, I observed both challenges and innovative solutions in patient care. I learned both the clinical aspect of plastics and burns care as well as the challenges of patient care in a global health setting. Using frameworks of cultural competency and comparative healthcare systems, this travelog reflects on adaptability, resilience, and the critical role of culturally responsive care in global health.







Clinical Learning Clinical Procedures

- Syndactyly release
- Cleft lip and palate repairs,
- Alveolar bone graft
- Nerve and Tendon Repairs
- Tendon transfers
- Axillary nerve neurolysis
- Z-plasty and V-Y plasty
- Precise grafting using Electric Zimmer dermatome
- Scar contracture release
- Torticollis surgery
- Cross-finger plasty
- Flap surgery on abscesses
- Eyebrow mapping
- Nevus surgery

- Burn management using Bactigras, Neosporin, specialized pressure dressings, amnion dressings, crepe bandages, plastic restraints and economical scar treatments (coconut oil and aloe vera massages) highlighted resourceful strategies for scar prevention.
- Management of complex cases including craniostenosis, hydrocephalus, bed sores, bilateral cleft, gunstock deformity, and trauma
- Informal conversations and didactic lectures covered foundational topics, including burn classifications, resuscitation, TBSA calculations, wound care, and pediatric scar management





Observational Experiences

1. **Adaptation in Resource-Limited Settings**: Witnessing limited availability of medical supplies such as gloves and single-use items, I learned to maximize resources, developing a "**jugaad**" mindset to deliver quality care under constraints. This included reusing scrubs, creating pressure dressings from available materials, using plastic bottles to create restraints, etc.
2. **Patient-Centered Communication**: Developing culturally responsive communication, such as explaining procedures in relatable terms for eg. **"kaanch ka dabba"** or **"behoshi ka doctor"**. I also observed the need to educate patients on necessary diagnostics to counter misconceptions about medical costs.
3. **Multidisciplinary Collaboration:** Interacting with departments like NICU and Orthopedics underscored the importance of cross-specialty care in complex cases
4. **Unique Challenges in Patient Population:** Observed the impact of limited Electronic Health Records (EHRs),patient-led purchasing of medical supplies, and cost & insurance barriers.

Impact and Reflections

1. **Commitment to Patient-Centered Care**: Witnessing the trust patients place in healthcare providers, even amidst limited resources, strengthened my dedication to empathetic, clear communication. This experience emphasized the importance of respecting cultural beliefs and financial constraints in patient care.
2. **Resilience and Resourcefulness:** Working in a resource-limited setting highlighted the importance of adapting, innovating, and maximizing available resources. This experience reinforced my commitment to bring practical, creative solutions to my future work in low-resource settings.
3. **Ethical Complexities in Care:** Navigating ethical questions around patient privacy in crowded environments and the equitable allocation of limited resources raised my awareness of the physician's role in social justice. This rotation deepened my understanding of healthcare as an equalizer, with a responsibility to advocate for fair treatment access.
4. **Understanding Socioeconomic Barriers:** Observing the financial struggles patients face, from basic medications to navigating complex insurance processes, broadened my awareness of how economic limitations impact patient compliance. I saw firsthand the need for accessible, affordable healthcare options to improve long-term outcomes.
5. **Emotional Resilience in Pediatric Care:** Engaging with young patients facing serious conditions required emotional resilience, patience, and empathy, preparing me for the emotional demands of my future career. This experience showed me the profound impact of compassionate, gentle communication in pediatric care.
6. **Vision for Future Practice:** Overall, this rotation inspired a clearer vision of my role in plastic surgery—not only as a surgeon but as an advocate for accessible, ethical, and culturally sensitive care, integrating resourcefulness and compassion for patients from all backgrounds. It encouraged my decision to pursue global charitable care and mission work in my future medical career.

Key Takeaways

1. **Clinical Experience in Plastic Surgery and Burn Care:** Gained hands-on experience in complex burn management, grafting techniques, and scar prevention, expanding my clinical knowledge in pediatric plastic surgery.
2. **Adaptability in Resource-Limited Settings:** Maximizing available resources and finding creative solutions are essential for effective healthcare in global health contexts.
3. **Culturally Sensitive Communication:** Using relatable language and respecting cultural backgrounds builds trust and strengthens the provider-patient relationship.
4. **Equity and Advocacy:** Advocating for accessible care and reducing financial and systemic barriers is key to improving patient outcomes in underserved areas.
5. **Holistic, Human-Centered Care:** Effective care goes beyond technical skills—it requires emotional resilience, compassion, and an understanding of patients' socio-economic and emotional needs







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