

Elective Report: Forensic Pathology in Glasgow, Scotland

Tajri Salek

Final year medical student

Hull York Medical School

2023

When planning my elective period, I decided I wanted to spend some time exploring forensic pathology. The involvement of anatomical knowledge on a larger scale down to microscopic findings in histology was an appealing factor. Upon researching locations for my elective, I learned that Glasgow hosts the largest forensics department in the UK. The mortuary is situated in the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital while the offices are on the University of Glasgow campus. I spent my time equally between the two sites.

While at the University of Glasgow, I was fortunate to receive teaching from the consultants on topics such as patterns of injury; the legal structure of conducting post-mortems in Scotland and identifying histopathological signs under a microscope. I was also given a tour of the histology laboratories. Here, I received a demonstration of the rigorous slide preparation process from the tissue extracted during post-mortems.

My supervisor, Dr Leighanne Deboys also encouraged me to complete a project during my elective. As I am interested in maternal conditions, I chose to research the causes of maternal mortality in the West of Scotland. This project enabled me to compare the regional data in Glasgow to national maternal mortality statistics reported by MBBRACE-UK. Among the 12 post-mortem reports I analysed, I concluded that venous thromboembolism was the most common cause of death. This was in contrast to MBBRACE-UK's most recent report which found cardiac disease to be the second most prevalent cause after COVID-19.¹ Limitations of my study include a small population size. I was fortunate enough to be able to present my project to six of the department's consultants and receive feedback.

In the mortuary I saw a range of post-mortem cases. I learned there are a wide variety of circumstances in which a post-mortem may be requested. Some of the reasons include suspected non-accidental injuries; road traffic collisions and deaths caused by industrial diseases. I discovered there is often collaboration with a range of different expertise. I met not only forensic pathologists but also a procurator fiscal, police, forensic photographers, anatomical pathology technologists, laboratory technicians, trainee pathology doctors and other medical students.

Overall, the elective has been extremely rewarding. I enjoyed consolidating my anatomical knowledge from preclinical years. I was also exposed to the criminal, ethical, histological, and epidemiological aspects of forensic pathology which makes the field very dynamic. I would encourage anyone with an interest in pathology to apply for a forensic pathology elective.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Deboys for the opportunity to gain some invaluable insight into forensic pathology. I would also like to thank all the staff at the University of Glasgow Forensics Department and Queen Elizabeth University Hospital mortuary for being so welcoming and helpful. I am grateful to BDIAP for selecting me for the elective bursary and making such a rewarding and unique experience possible.



1. Maternal mortality 2019-2021 | MBRRACE-UK | NPEU <https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/mbrance-uk/data-brief/maternal-mortality-2019-2021>. Accessed: 2023-09-02