

Operation Childlife - Clinical Travel Fellowship Report

Danielle McLaughlin, 2023 Recipient - Ulan Bataar, Mongolia, October 2023



About me

- Irish trained paediatric surgeon
- Locum consultant paediatric surgeon at Royal Manchester Children's Hospital
- Academic profile, mentorship and leadership
- Global surgery

I am currently working as a locum consultant paediatric surgeon at Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, having completed specialist training in Dublin in January 2023.

As a student and a trainee, exposure to global surgery had a profound impact on me, in particular when I joined an OCL mission in Tanzania in 2010, as well as a student elective in South Africa in 2004.

This fellowship has given me an opportunity to begin a journey towards a consultant career marked by altruism and global surgery provision, as well building on my track record of academia, mentorship and leadership.

The mission

- 14th – 28th October
- Bahraini and Irish team
- Hospital No.1, Ulaanbaatar
 - Clinical
 - Conference
 - Mentorship and research (week 2)



MONGOLIA

Population: 3,3 million
Provinces: 21
Capital: Ulaanbaatar
Currency: Tögrög (MNT)
World Happiness Report: 5.456
Official languages: Mongolian



I was particularly pleased to be part of the second OCL mission to Mongolia, in October 2023, as a member of an Irish and Bahraini team, sponsored by the Christina Noble Charitable Foundation.

I completed a two-week mission at Hospital No.1 in Ulaanbaatar. The first week, with the full team, included both clinical activities and an international conference organised by our surgical hosts.

I completed the second week of the mission solo, dedicating my time to mentorship and research activities.



- Collaboration
- Complex surgeries
- Consultations
- Education
- Multi-national community
- Altruism
- Partnership

On the top left our team are arriving to the hospital for a day of operating.

Our clinical activities during week one of the mission included face-to-face consultations and complex surgeries. These were truly a collaborative effort, both between members of the newly minted Irish and Bahraini team, as well as with the local surgical, anaesthetic, medical and nursing teams, all of whom contributed positively to the cases we completed. We also could not have functioned without our wonderful guide and translator from the Christina Noble Charitable Foundation. I particularly benefited from seeing the relationships beginning to build between ourselves and the local clinician staff, who all expressed their hope for a long-term successful partnership with OCL.

A major tumour operation was one of the most vital cases to complete during this week, as Mongolia does not have any specialist paediatric oncology surgeons. This child had spent many months in hospital as her family are from a remote region with very poor transport options and had been on a prolonged course of chemotherapy to control her cancer as local surgeons could not safely remove her tumour. On the top right is our lovely patient three days after major surgery to remove her kidney tumour, who had decided she was too well for staying in bed and was ready to run around the ward.

At the end of week one, the team attended an international paediatric surgery conference which was well organized by the local team. This was an excellent educational opportunity as I learned a great deal about the experience and ambition of the local team. Our team in turn shared the

Irish and Bahraini experience with attendees which included colleagues from Korea and Japan involved in global surgery provision. We were also treated to some Mongolian throat singing. Our team then had the opportunity to visit the Christina Noble Charitable Foundation orphanage and school located in a deprived area of Ulaanbaatar suburbs. There we saw altruism in action through their work, meeting the lovely children and staff, and learned about how important the partnership with OCL is to the foundation through speaking with Helenita Noble and her team (bottom right picture, previous page).



- Culture
- Resilience and resourcefulness
- Challenges

Projects:

Hirschsprung's Disease patient outcomes
Neonatal congenital malformations database
Mentorship and training

As the rest of the team departed, I spent some downtime with the local surgeons on a trip to the stark but beautiful Mongolian countryside in the "Land of the Eternal Blue Sky"

This gave me a better appreciation for Mongolian culture, even if not all of the food I was offered suited my palate. I came to understand how inaccessible some regions are even within a few hours of the capital. It also allowed me to talk to the Mongolian surgeons away from the busy hospital. Challenges around training within Mongolia and lack of international opportunities are a major concern for both senior and junior surgeons and my offer of mentorship for Mongolian trainee surgeons was gladly received.

My second week of the trip was occupied by both mentorship and research activities. Projects were agreed upon in collaboration with local surgeons who told me they have never previously had the opportunity to publish peer reviewed work. A neonatal congenital malformations database was set up for prospective data collection which will allow us to understand, analyse and subsequently target improvements in care for babies with complex surgical problems. A further project was also established to collect data on the care of patients with Hirschsprung's Disease. Due to lack of resources and local expertise the management of these patients is difficult and reflects challenges in the provision of children's surgery in Mongolia as a whole.