

Reflections from a Clinical Placement in Rural South India

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation

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AMAR SEVA SANGAM
A Valley for the Differently Abled
TAMIL NADU, INDIA

Location and Clinical Site



Amar Seva Sangam (ASSA) is a grassroots NGO located in Ayikudy Village in Tamil Nadu. ASSA is a leader in community rehabilitation, education, and empowerment of persons with disabilities in rural South India. **Handi-Care Intl.** – a Canadian charity – has been arranging clinical placements for PT and OT students at ASSA since 2006.

The centre includes:

- Integrated school
- Centre for early intervention for children with delayed development
- Outpatient rehab facility for stroke, neurological impairments and MSK injuries
- Post-acute care rehab centre for SCI
- Vocational training centre
- Village-based rehabilitation program
- Hostel and residential home for youth affected by physical and intellectual disabilities



Clinical Experience and Challenges

Details of Clinical Work

- Post-acute care for adult male patients with spinal cord injuries (SCI)
- ≈ 20 in-patients undergoing an intensive 6 months to 1 year rehabilitation program
- Patients receive therapy 6 days per week
- PT/OT roles include: positioning, functional mobility, safe transfers, skin integrity and pressure sore management, wheelchair training, equipment needs (e.g. wheelchairs, support surfaces, toileting, standing frames), self-care skills (e.g. eating and dressing), and vocational training



Clinical Challenges:

- Manage a full case load with limited clinical experience working with SCI patients and minimal clinical supervision on site
- Lack of clinical resources
- Language barrier

Strategies to Overcome the Challenges:

- Reach out to clinicians and get experience/advice before leaving
- Lose the 'just a student' mindset
- Trust your clinical knowledge and past experiences but be mindful of your limits
- Break it down to the basics, be creative, and find solutions with the limited resources you have

Thoughts and Reflections

- The importance of making a conscious effort to immerse yourself in the experience. It is easy to become overwhelmed. Culture shock is real. Develop a daily practice to ground yourself, come back to the present, self-reflect, set intentions and then appreciate and make the most out of the opportunity. Your time abroad will fly by without you realizing it.
- Be humble, practice humility, and remain open. Don't let the language barrier hold you back from trying to communicate.
- My most cherished memories from the trip were befriending the Indian PT students who were also doing their clinical internships at ASSA. Learning what it's like to grow up in India, engaging in dialogue about our religion and belief systems, discussing college life, dating and marriages.
- Getting the experience to be a part of a community where disability is the norm and the minority is the abled body was truly inspiring.

