

Elective grants for an ophthalmology elective for a medical student surviving in a cost-of-living crisis

BY NEEL VYAS

In a time where cost of living is significantly increasing, and the student NHS bursary is remaining stagnant, funding a medical elective is becoming increasingly more challenging for medical students. Surveys have shown that medical students typically get two to 12-days exposure to ophthalmology throughout their medical school experience [1]. Therefore, ophthalmology electives are an essential way to get further exposure to the speciality.

Electives allow medical students to see ophthalmic practice and conditions that may only be prevalent in certain areas of the world. Ophthalmology specialty training applications are notoriously known to be competitive, and with one point for completing an ophthalmology elective, they provide even more incentive for medical students to design and execute an elective in the field [2].

A medical elective typically involves a four to 12-week placement period spent in the penultimate or final year of medical school, whereby a student can experience healthcare either abroad or within the UK. Often, this is organised by the medical students themselves by choosing, contacting, and organising their placement.

The cost of an elective profoundly varies from relatively low-cost electives in the UK to significantly costly electives abroad. Medical students also need to be aware of the extra added costs of organising an elective abroad, including flight tickets, visa, travel insurance, accommodation, and fees from host institutes (which is becoming increasingly common). Often this leads to a limiting factor for several medical students who cannot afford these expenses and as a result are not able to conduct their elective at their desired location. As well as abroad, some UK-based electives are also becoming increasingly costly – for example, an elective at Moorfield Eye Hospital in London includes a fee of £200 from the host institute [3].

There are several supportive organisations that offer elective grants, however, many medical students are unaware of these opportunities for funding. In the following article I have outlined five elective grants which support medical students wishing to undergo an elective in ophthalmology.

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists' Patrick Trevor-Roper Travel Award

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth) is a great starting place for a medical student wishing to undergo an ophthalmic elective. The Patrick Trevor-Roper Travel Award was first introduced in 1997 following a kind donation of £20,000 by Mr Patrick Trevor-Roper and is open to all medical students in the UK and Ireland. Applications open annually, offering three individual awards for an amount of £500 each. Medical students must carry out their elective placement within 12 months of the closing date of the application. Following a successful application, they are required to write a short report of

their elective experience which is published on the college website (unless previously opted out). Publicly available data published on the college's website showed that in 2018 only 21 applicants applied nationally. This shows that these elective awards are evidently under subscribed and therefore there is a likely opportunity to obtain one – in 2022, due to the 25th anniversary of the travel award, RCOphth offered six awards rather than the usual three [4].



The Royal College of Surgeons of England Elective Prize

The Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS England) offers an annual elective grant of £500 supporting clinical-year medical students in pursuing an elective in surgery (including ophthalmology) in a developing nation. Applicants must be paid affiliates of RCS England and be undergoing their elective within the respective academic year. In addition to including the medical student's elective plans and objectives, further supporting letters are required, including a curriculum vitae, a letter from a surgeon / dean from their medical school, as well as a letter from the consultant surgeon at the proposed elective attachment. This elective grant is often competitive but is worth an application for an ophthalmic elective [5].



The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow's Medical Elective Scholarship

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow (RCPSG) offers a medical elective scholarship for electives spent abroad lasting four to six-weeks. The scholarship amounts to £1000 to support medical students with the costs they incur. It is open to all undergraduate medical students in the UK, offering a maximum of eight awards annually (at least three of which will be selected from the University of Glasgow) [6].



The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd) offers two elective bursaries: The Russell Trust Bursary and the Binks Trust Medical Student Elective Travel Award. The Russell Trust Bursary is offered in association with the Russell Trust, which opens up annually in August to all UK and Ireland medical students undergoing surgical

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electives. The Binks Trust Travel Award is supported by the Binks Trust, which is awarded in April / May to support all medical students in the UK and Ireland. Both support medical students undergoing a surgical elective, therefore they are worthwhile option for students undergoing an ophthalmology elective [7].



The Royal Society of Medicine Travel grants

The Royal Society of Medicine (RSM) is a key resource all medical students should utilise. They offer several elective grants in a range of different specialties. In ophthalmology, elective grants will be advertised in their ophthalmology section on RSM's website. Alternatively, general elective grants which can encompass an ophthalmology elective are also worth applying for. For instance, in 2023 they have an elective award available through the joint British Medical and Dental Student's Trust and the RSM. As with many elective applications, this requires you to submit an elective plan with a research proposal to conduct during your elective period [8].



Conclusions

All these elective fund applications are either aimed at, or relevant to, medical students wishing to undergo an ophthalmology elective. Further support is also offered by these organisations to students hoping to do location-specific electives – the RCSEd, for example, supports additional financial grants to students who intend to do an elective placement in Africa [7]. Similar bursaries with specific criteria do exist and are worth having a look for. This article only highlights a small proportion of support that is accessible and I'm sure with further research, this will reveal several additional organisations and bursaries that is available to support your elective.

References

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[All links last accessed May 2023].

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