

Settling in the UK as an MTI trainee  
*Dr. Prashida Guha Sarkar*

First of all, congratulations! Welcome to the RCOG MTI scheme, and soon you will be on your way to the UK. The time period between getting your AoMRC CoS and flying out to the UK are riddled with doubt and anxiety that come hand in hand with plans to settle in a new country and in a new culture. However, with a little planning most of these anxieties can be laid to rest. I hope by sharing my experiences I can help to make your transition to working in the UK that bit smoother.

**Pre-requisites before travelling to the UK**

- Money

One of the biggest drawbacks about working in a new country is the burden of expenses, especially in the first month of your stay. This is how your first few days in UK will pan out – GMC registration interview, collecting your BRP, applying for NINo, occupational health check, DBS check – and then you get your final appointment letter at your trust. Needless to say, you might end up staying well over a week or so before you actually start working and in some cases (if you've joined after 15<sup>th</sup> of that month) you might get your first salary at the end of the second month of employment. This means you need to carry with you sufficient money to tide you over for *at least* one month, if not longer. For those of you travelling with family, this could mean a substantial amount of money, hence it might be a good idea to start saving up early. Usually 2,000 GBP should cover a month's expenses for one (including accommodation).

- Accommodation

One of the biggest worries for me before travelling to the UK was accommodation, and rightfully so. If you're posted in and around London, you might have a difficult time getting hospital accommodation. Outside London though, there are usually flats available on the hospital premises which you can apply for. My suggestion would be to get in touch with your hospital accommodation authorities as soon as you get a placement (most trusts have details of the different types of flats – triple sharing / family flats etc. on their official website) – these flats are usually more cost-effective (with electricity and council tax etc. paid for) and on the hospital campus, hence making it easier to commute to and from work. It might be a good idea to even pay for the first 2 months of rent for hospital accommodation before even travelling to the UK, that way you don't have to worry about paying rent especially in the 1<sup>st</sup> month when you may not even get paid.

- Bank account

The biggest challenge in opening a bank account in the UK are the documents they require. Usually you need the following – passport, BRP, proof of address (tenancy agreement) and a letter from the trust mentioning your annual income and that you are employed with them. Most MTI's struggle with address proof and the letter from the hospital. A good idea is to get in touch with your hospital/trust Recruitment office before coming to the UK and request them for a letter to hand to the bank – usually your passport, BRP and this letter are enough – this is particularly helpful when you don't have a fixed address yet. There is no preference in choosing a bank, but most do opt for HSBC, since they have branches all over the world. You must book appointments with banks (can be done online on their official website) even for opening an account and **MUST** be punctual in attending your appointment. I have seen many of my colleagues struggle and panic over opening bank accounts – however if you plan ahead, and have your BRP, passport and letter from the trust, it should be fairly simple.

As soon as you open an account, transfer most of the cash you've brought with yourself into that account, but keep some in hand as it takes a few days for your credit/debit cards to arrive.

- Commuting and travel

For those living in London, the easiest and most cost-effective way to get around the city is the London underground (tube) and everyone should get an Oyster card as soon as you land in the city as it's the easiest way to pay for journeys. If you don't have an oyster card a contactless credit/debit card or mobile phone pay as you go can be used [read more here](#). For travelling between different parts of the country, taking the train is the easiest way. Download the "trainline.com" app and book your tickets well in advance to avoid spending too much on train tickets.

If you are comfortable driving, you can get your international driving license back in your home country, it is valid for a year in the UK. After that, you have to apply for driving license here. Buying/renting a car is relatively easy, however, driving in the UK can be a bit challenging – for e.g. speedometer in the cars read in miles/hr and not km/hr, you drive in the left lane if you want to drive slow and drive in the right lane when you want to drive fast, you slow down to let people cross the road etc. For those not accustomed to following the lane system back home, you might need to practice on the UK roads first but otherwise it's relatively simple and you should be able to adapt to driving on the UK with time and caution..

- Clothes and the weather

Don't bother with bringing too many clothes to the UK, chances are you'll have no use for the woollen garments you thought would keep you warm. The weather here is colder than whatever you had (even in winter back home) so any warm clothes you bring from home will be utterly useless and you'll end up buying jackets here (you'll shop at Primark in the beginning, then gradually step up to M&S). The same applies for shoes as well – don't overburden your luggage by carrying shoes here, you'll need to buy boots and another pair of shoes to wear in clinics, once you arrive.

- Food and drink

Food and drink are probably the easiest bit of settling in the UK. Regardless of which part of UK you are working in, there's a Tesco's / Asda/Lidl/ Aldi/Sainsbury within walking distance for your shopping. Most larger supermarkets will have a 'world food' aisle where you will be likely to be able to find a selection of products from your home countries – Africa, Asia and European products. You can even order your groceries online to be delivered for a small charge to your doorstep.

- Electronics

Make sure you bring at least one adapter (power plugs and sockets are of type G in England) so that you're able to charge your phone and laptop.

### **Once you arrive – the challenges**

- Culture shock

Regardless of which part of the world you're from, you're in for a major culture shock. From the food, to the language, to the work culture - everything is different. There is no shortcut to getting over the culture shock, the only way to do so would be to embrace the fact that you

are from a different part of the world and seek help from those around you – could be a colleague / supervisor / MTIs who came before you. Eventually, you'll get the hang of it.

- Work culture

Work culture here is drastically different from wherever you're coming from. The main difference you'll face will be in two sectors –

1. Patients have a say in what treatment they undergo – be aware of the Montgomery ruling, and that patient counselling requires you to give them time, hearing them out and discussing with your seniors wherever possible. The best way to learn how to talk to patients is by sticking with the senior registrars and consultants. Don't feel undermined if you are asked to be an observer for the first couple of months, instead use this opportunity to sit in and listen to your consultants talk to their patients, their manner of approach, how they deal with difficult patients, how they break bad news. Most of us come from countries where English isn't the first language, so it's important to learn the layman terms for medical jargon – such as womb for uterus, wee for urine, waterworks for anything related to urinary tract etc. The most important thing to do is to be aware of everything that goes on around you, it gives you a sense of how the NHS works and how different patient care is here.
2. Relationship with colleagues and superiors – this was a pleasant surprise. Back home, there is a definite hierarchy and chain of command and you don't get a chance to question your seniors. Say goodbye to that. There is a hierarchy here as well, but it isn't as formal and strict as back home. You are encouraged to ask questions at every point (don't bombard your consultants with questions in the middle of a busy clinic, though). The downside to this is that every decision you make can be questioned as well, especially by midwives, since they recognise you are new to the system and may take a while to win their trust. The best way to avoid confrontation is by taking the opinions of those working with you as well, but being firm and have a rationale ready behind whatever decision you make. Also, document everything. I can't over-emphasise the importance of documentation and communication with both patients and colleagues.

- Timing

Be punctual. Tardiness is not tolerated here.

- Organising leave

Always plan ahead. My biggest lesson in the UK has been to plan well in advance. Last minute leave applications don't get approved here, no matter what the emergency, especially for RCOG courses, events and exams. Plan weeks/months ahead, book your leave and tickets in advance.

- Attitude towards work and colleagues

Everyone has a different reason for wanting to come and work in the UK. Some came for the money, some came to pass their exams and some came here with hopes of getting integrated into the core training program. What is important to remember is that you volunteered to come settle in this foreign nation, so you'll be the one making the adjustments. Don't make the mistake of feeling entitled and learn to unlearn. Don't lecture your colleagues about "protocols back home" - the idea is for you to learn how things work in the UK and not the other way around. Try and learn as much as you can.

- Exams

Most of us come here to pass part 2 and part 3 MRCOG. Start preparing as early as you can. Apply to sit the exams in the first year of your tenure, booking a slot for part 3 can be a challenge so don't leave it for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Knowing your GTGs and NICE guidelines always comes handy for both the exams and at work, so start reading these as early as possible.

### **The Positives**

Labour ward training – the training in managing labour ward in the UK is unparalleled, especially CTG and labour ward prioritisation. Use of rotational instrumental delivery is also quite common here, unlike other countries, so it gives you a good opportunity to hone your skills in instrumental deliveries.

Working hours – working hours aren't as torturous as back home. If you plan ahead, you can plan short trips to nearby destinations – and there are plenty of destinations to choose from. Travelling in and around UK is safe and easy, if planned well in advance.

Support – Once you're here, try and attend the MTI Induction event held by the RCOG, as it gives you a chance to meet your fellow MTI colleagues and they will be the biggest support system you have here. It also helps that all former and present MTI doctors face the same challenges and their insight in getting out of tough situations will be invaluable. You will have an educational supervisor once you join the hospital, and make sure you meet with them regularly and keep them updated about your progress, and if you have any concerns flag it up with them. They are usually very supportive and help you keep focussed on your personal developmental plan. And don't forget that if you are facing difficulties or challenges at work you can contact the MTI Office in confidence.

Use these 2 years wisely. *Never lose focus on why you came here in the first place and work towards that goal.* It is easy to get distracted and lose your insight here, but set small and realistic targets frequently which you can achieve. Try and attend as many courses as possible. Also, try and travel as much as you can. Weekends can be quite lonely and the weather doesn't quite help. So staying indoors can be depressing. Living in the UK makes you responsible, you learn to take care of yourself and you become more organised. Remember, everything must be done on your own here - people will help ONLY if you are willing to help yourself here.

Living and working here has its own charm and while it takes a few months to adjust and adapt, it's an exciting adventure which, if done correctly can reap many benefits professionally and personally. Remember that everyone struggles in the beginning, but there's a strong chain of communication among the MTI doctors in the UK (maintained through several Whatsapp groups, MTI Buddy scheme etc.) – you will find support from your peers who will have likely faced similar problems and will be able to give you guidance or simply a friendly face to speak to.

I hope you find this useful, and enjoy your stay here. Cheers!

### ABBREVIATIONS USED –

BRP – Biometric Residence Permit  
NINo – National Insurance Number  
CoS – Certificate of Sponsorship  
AoMRC – Academy Of Medical Royal Colleges

USEFUL WEBSITES –

[www.moneysupermarket.com](http://www.moneysupermarket.com)

[www.rightmove.com](http://www.rightmove.com)

*This article was kindly written to assist RCOG MTI trainees by Dr Prashida Guha Sarkar, MTI trainee, James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough*