

# Report on the Tuanku Muhriz Fellowship, 2025-2026

I am very grateful to Tuanku Muhriz, the College of Physicians of Malaysia and the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh for the opportunity to visit Malaysia and learn more about Malaysian healthcare. My research interest is in  $\alpha$ -thalassaemia, a common form of inherited anaemia and a condition that is highly prevalent in Southeast Asia, and it was this interest that motivated me to apply for the fellowship.

I am a haematology registrar by background and have recently completed a PhD at the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine in Oxford, examining the regulation of the embryonically expressed  $\alpha$ -like  $\zeta$ -globin gene and how it can be targeted by gene editing strategies and upregulated as a treatment for patients with severe  $\alpha$ -thalassaemia, where there is loss of the  $\alpha$ -globin genes. I was keen to learn what the burden of disease was for haemoglobinopathies in Malaysia, the treatment strategies available including transfusions and access to transplant, and the research that was being done into the thalassaemias, and  $\alpha$ -thalassaemia in particular.

My first and abiding takeaway from the fellowship was that the treatment of haematological diseases in general, haemoglobinopathies and malignant disorders included, is very similar between Malaysia and the UK. The diagnostics available and the protocols followed are essentially the same. I was pleased to learn in Kota Kinabalu that the team there find our Oxford-based chemotherapy protocols (available publicly online) very helpful!

The fellowship took me to many different parts of peninsular Malaysia and Borneo. I began the fellowship in Ampang Hospital in Kuala Lumpur where I learned about the molecular diagnostic facilities available and visited the Clinical Research Unit. I next went to Kota Kinabalu and met the team at Queen Elizabeth I Hospital and Likas Hospital. I was very interested to learn that Sabah has the highest rates of thalassaemia in Malaysia. Sabah was also where I tasted durian for the first time and I think I'm a fan.



Alor Setar was next on the agenda and I had a very fruitful discussion with the haematology and haematopathology team there who have a clinical and research interest in  $\alpha$ -thalassaemia. I

travelled north to Kangar and was shown around the thalassaemia day unit. I also had the opportunity to present on my PhD research and had a very informative Q&A session with the medical team. Finally, the fellowship ended in Seremban where I visited Hospital Tuanku Ja'afar.

The fellowship gave me an insight into the structure of the Malaysian healthcare system, especially the split between state, university and private, which I would not have obtained otherwise. I learned that thalassaemias are managed in the same way as in the UK and that issues around availability of blood for transfusions and compliance with iron chelation are the same in Malaysia as they are in the UK. I was also very fortunate to meet clinicians who have a research interest in thalassaemia and I hope to develop lasting collaborations with them.

Finally, I returned to the UK with a new understanding of the healthcare system and the management of haematological disorders in Malaysia, and also with wonderful memories of the people I met, the excellent food I indulged in (and the insight I gained into how much spice I can tolerate), and a knowledge of Malaysian history, of which I had been mostly ignorant before the fellowship. The Tuanku Muhriz fellowship was an unforgettable experience and I thank all those who made it possible.

