



The Royal College of Pathologists
Pathology: the science behind the cure

Learning from exceptional pathologists in a placement at Sheffield Children's Hospital

Student placements at Sheffield Children's Hospital provide invaluable experiences.

Published: 22 January 2026

Author: Shaikha Al Najjar

Read time: 3 Mins

Shaikha Al Najjar, medical student at Mohammed Bin Rashid University, reports on her student placement at Sheffield Children's Hospital, reflecting on the inspiration she gained from observing paediatric pathology cases.

As an Emirati medical student from Mohammed Bin Rashid University of Medicine and Health Sciences (MBRU), I approached my placement at Sheffield Children's Hospital with clear goals in mind. I wanted to immerse myself in an environment where I could learn directly from exceptional, specialised pathologists.

More importantly, I aimed to bridge the gap between the theoretical knowledge of pathology that I had studied extensively and its real-life application in patient care. I was eager to gain first-hand experience and deepen my understanding of its diagnostic value in paediatric care.

Invaluable insight into pathology's vital role

My placement in the pathology department at Sheffield Children's Hospital allowed me to achieve these aspirations and more. I had the privilege of observing a wide spectrum of fetal, neonatal and paediatric pathology cases. These experiences highlighted the vital role of pathology in guiding clinical decision-making, especially in sensitive and complex scenarios such as miscarriages, stillbirths and neonatal deaths. I also attended post mortems, where the pathologists provided invaluable insight into their approaches and the wider significance of their findings.

In particular, I developed a strong appreciation for placental pathology. I learned how to approach diagnosis, interpret histological features and correlate findings with clinical presentations. Through these cases, I came to recognise how frequently the placenta holds essential clues that explain adverse outcomes in pregnancy, fetal development and neonatal health.

Whether in cases of unexplained stillbirth or neonatal compromise, placental examination often provides the missing link in understanding disease processes. This experience not only reinforced the importance of careful placental assessment but also demonstrated how pathology contributes to providing answers for families during the most difficult of circumstances.

Outstanding support

The placement was made especially rewarding by the outstanding team that supported my learning throughout. I am deeply grateful to Professor Marta Cohen, Dr Mah Sheena, Dr Kashif Mohammed, Dr Jaeike Faber, Dr Sophie Stenton and Dr Eleanor McTaggart for their generous teaching, guidance and encouragement. Their expertise and openness transformed my experience from an observational placement into an inspiring, interactive and truly formative opportunity. I am also sincerely thankful to the Royal College of Pathologists and MBRU for enabling the international collaboration which made this experience possible.

This placement has significantly shaped the way I view my future medical career. It has shown me the intellectual depth and clinical impact of pathology, reinforcing its importance not only in diagnosis but also in patient management, research and family counselling.

I leave Sheffield Children's Hospital with greater confidence in applying theoretical knowledge to clinical practice, a stronger understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of medicine and a deep respect for the role of paediatric pathology in improving outcomes for children and their families.

I believe this experience will remain a milestone of my medical education, inspiring me to continue pursuing opportunities that integrate clinical medicine with the investigative power of pathology. In particular, the exposure to placental and perinatal pathology has left a lasting impression, motivating me to explore this subspecialty further and to consider how I might one day contribute to advancing diagnostic approaches in this field.

Meet the author



SHAIKHA AL NAJJAR

MEDICAL STUDENT, MBRU