**Name:** Ann Cheng

**Placement Dates:** July – August 2016 (3 weeks)

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| **Organisation** |  |
| **Teaching** |  |
| **Surgical Exposure** |  |
| **Hands on Experience** |  |
| **Hospitality** |  |
| **Accommodation** |  |
| **Overall Experience** |  |

*‘As an international student studying in the UK, I had no idea where Middlesbrough was prior to this placement to be brutally honest. While I am still fuzzy on the geography, I can say that it is definitely one of the best places to be for learning!*

*The experience there was absolutely incredible. Reading prior students’ reports, I was excited by the prospect of hands-on training such as sternotomy and thoracotomy. I had already spent a few weeks in the cardiothoracic unit at my home university with ample opportunities for scrubbing and suturing, but the placement taught me more ways to improve my technique than I could imagine. The sternotomy and thoracotomy were certainly thrilling (but really daunting at the same time as I had never held a bone saw), and the delicacy involved in vein harvesting all provided a taster of what the surgical specialty has to offer. Even more so, I was able to observe several procedures that are not commonly performed elsewhere, a highlight being a robotic surgery, not to mention the chance to play on the Da Vinci robot afterwards! Beyond the excitement of novel experiences, I was able to expand and consolidate my knowledge and understanding of perioperative care and imaging modalities, and can now confidently interpret a cardiac angiogram thanks to the various teaching made available while I was there. Everyone really went out of their way to make sure I was making the most out of the time available!*

*However, the placement was so much more than that. Mr. Ferguson designed the placement for students to evaluate realistically what a career in cardiothoracic surgery is like, and whether it is something we can see ourselves doing in years’ time. And that is exactly what it is. As medical students, we often construct our understanding of a specialty based on the small amount of experience we have; more often than not, said experience is “protected” because everyone wants the medical student to see the best they have to offer. However, this placement has shown me both the good and the bad of the specialty, the reality of it all. There were certainly grueling times, and watching how people approach and overcome difficulties, the decision making process every step of the way, and thinking all the while “can I do what they do?” have certainly renewed my aspirations. Speaking with the various surgeons, from consultant to trainee level, have further challenged and reshaped my understanding of the specialty, and the three weeks definitely helped clarify what it will take for me to become a cardiothoracic surgeon in the future.*

*With all that in mind, I would encourage everyone to apply to the placement. If you do go, go with an open mind to see and learn everything, not just the technical aspects of surgery. You’d be surprised by how much more you walk away with!’*