

# Laidlaw Final Reflection

Sitting down to write this reflection, I am struck by how transformative these past two years have been, both in my personal growth and direction, but also in how much I've realised the Laidlaw programme shaped my university experience. What remains with me is not just the skills I have gained – it is overwhelmingly the people I have met and with whom I have had the privilege of becoming friends. As a medical student, I am on a separate campus and have long contact hours. This meant that as a fresher, I easily fell into the rhythm of spending most of my time with fellow medics, rarely meeting students from other disciplines. Laidlaw helped me branch out of this habit. This blessing to connect with peers across UCL and beyond challenged me to think differently, broadening my view being surrounded with such inspiring, driven, and diverse perspectives.

I vividly remember our first residential weekend. It was in the middle of our Year 1 exam season and we went to Cumberland Lodge. A mix of drizzle and shine, with absolutely insane spaghetti bolognese, it was a welcome retreat from the incredible stress in London. Our leadership projects and puzzles were like playing games. We herded each other blindfolded as “sheep”, we worked in teams to put shapes and pieces together, we created towers of marshmallows, learning to just “go for it”. The fresh air put me in a much better mood. The people made me feel so at home; everyone was so kind, so curious, so supportive. While we are all motivated students, we also built each other up and pushed ourselves forward together. I don't recall ever feeling that anyone was tearing anyone else down or had any sort of underhand agenda, a feeling that if I am honest, is one I feel most days at university. I thought perhaps it was just how wonderful the environment was at the time, but I was pleasantly proved that my cohort of Laidlaw Scholars – and really all the Laidlaw students whom I've met in all years and at different universities – truly are an amazing bunch. And above all, after just one weekend, my roommate (we were randomly assigned) and I developed a close friendship. We have met up regularly since.

A few weeks after that wonderful weekend, I began my research internship at the Great Ormond Street Institute for Child Health (GOS ICH) under Dr Kathleen Gärtner, an opportunity made possible through Laidlaw. I remember at first feeling disoriented. I recognised terms and lab assays from lectures but struggled because I had never actually put them into practice. From choosing the correct pipette for accuracy to meticulously recording every detail in my lab book, I quickly realised how much I had to grow. As the weeks progressed, though, I could feel myself becoming more organised and intentional, thinking in my mind, “Why am I doing this experiment? How does it fit into the larger project?” This shift made me see that I learn best with both hands-on practice but also intentional reflection.

Gaining confidence, I was able to work independently and perform wet-lab procedures that contributed to research on the characterisation of the cellular HIV reservoir in differently treated children. The project specifically explored the potential of using a drug already given to adults for HIV+ pediatric patients, an extension of the ODYSSEY trial. Working alongside experienced researchers was equally formative. Their feedback and encouragement helped me understand the details of experimental design. Their mentorship taught me to prioritise seeking understanding, and I am deeply grateful to Kathleen and her colleagues for including me as part of the team and offering extra wet-lab work to improve my skills.

The impact of this internship on my academic journey extends. My write-up on the work I completed during these weeks earned me the medical school's John Jepson Memorial Essay Prize. More importantly, seeing how research translates to clinical solutions highlighted to me the core link between critical analysis and the evidence-based medicine driving patient care. The skills I developed will be invaluable to my iBSc and thesis this year. Without Laidlaw, I would not have come down the path I have. It fundamentally shaped the choices I made in applying for my iBSc, and has helped me gain further research experiences.

My Leadership-in-Action project this last summer took me to a different side of medicine, volunteering as a clinic assistant in HealthServe's charity clinic. Here, I faced the realities of healthcare inequalities more

directly, from navigating language barriers to dealing with how infrastructure can leave migrant workers vulnerable to witnessing the comfort that even small acts of care, such as giving water and snacks, can bring. The experience challenged me to lead with empathy, patience, and humility, especially when I did not know the answers or needed to use body language to communicate. I came out of my LIA with two new life goals: to continue volunteering in pro bono healthcare as part of my career, and to try to learn conversational Mandarin so that I can better serve patients I may interact with in the future.

More than any technical skill, my LIA reminded me that leadership in medicine is not about how much you know or how much you can do, it is about having the intention to serve the population you are surrounded by and having this intention guide everything you do.

The contrast between my two summers, one deep in laboratory research, the other in community engagement, represents what Laidlaw has taught me. Leadership is about being rigorous in what you do and learn, striving to wonder and understand more as an individual. At the same time, it is about the people. These are not separate spheres; without knowing your community, you cannot properly lead yourself nor your work in a direction grounded in contextual appreciation, one that will impact your team and society. They are two sides of the same coin. And the skills learned in any of these experiences are useful, whether you become someone labelled as a “leader” or not.

I think it's safe to say that every part of the programme taught me to experiment, reflect, and grow in ways I would not have done alone. I am emerging from these two years more confident, more thoughtful, and with a better sense of the kind of leader I hope to be: one who has Faith and integrity, is curious, collaborative, and true to myself and the people around me.

I am grateful and blessed to have had this opportunity.