

## ***European Studies Placement Report***

### **Why I chose to study on the European studies program?**

The European Option program was one of the reasons I chose to undertake my medical undergraduate degree at the University of Manchester. As a Moroccan national, French is my third language. I also undertook an HL French course for my international baccalaureate. It was therefore important for me to learn medical French vocabulary whilst maintaining my conversational French in case I choose to practice in my home country. I also loved the idea of going abroad for four months to gain a better understanding of French culture and the healthcare system.

Because I was already fluent in French, I joined the Manchester French classes in year 3. It was sometimes difficult to build the motivation to go evening classes, especially when I was away in a DGH. I also did a StEP during block 1 of year 5 in Morocco, allowing me to practice medical French in preparation for my placement abroad.

When choosing a city, I knew I wanted to go to Paris. The idea of living in one of the most beautiful, diverse and exciting cities in the world sounded perfect. Although I had been to the city several times, I really felt the need to live there for a few months to truly enjoy the various things Paris has to offer. I was also looking forward to spending time with friends and family living who are living in Paris.

I based my choice of universities on geography and reputation. I did not want to move to Paris but end up in a hospital on the outskirts. Since I'm interested in a career in paediatrics, I wanted to undertake one of my placements in "l'Hopital Necker des Enfants Malades", a world-renown paediatric specialist centre. Since this hospital is linked to Paris Descartes, I decided to apply there and was thankfully accepted. I was also happy that my placement involved two two-month placements, in different specialties and different hospitals to gain a varied experience.

## **Getting to Paris**

I went to Paris on the Saturday before the beginning of the placement. This gave me enough time to rest and pack after exempting exams. I decided to fly over from Manchester airport as this would be easier with three suitcases! I landed in Charles de Gaulle airport, which is about an hour away from central Paris (at the moment there are no flights from Manchester Paris Orly). My uncle who lives in Paris picked me up which was very helpful. There are also buses connecting the airport to different city centre destinations for those who can manage their suitcases alone and a standard taxi fee to central Paris of 55 euros. In preparation for my move, I also ensured I had some euros in cash just in case. This was really helpful as setting up a bank account took much longer than expected. First of all, because banks are closed on Mondays, I had to wait until Tuesday to set up my account. It then took a couple of weeks to receive my new bank card so I was glad to have cash on me.

## **Accommodation**

I decided to decline the university accommodation and started looking for a flat using online websites. The flats were generally small and relatively expensive. As I started worrying about not finding a decent place, a family member who knew I was moving to Paris offered me to stay with them. This was perfect as the flat was in central Paris and it meant being able to spend time with my cousins and really practice my conversational French on a daily basis.

The flat I was staying in was in the 15eme arrondissement, which is located in south west Paris. I really loved the area as it was away from the very busy and touristy Parisian areas but still close to beautiful sites like the les Invalides, Champs de Mars, and Jardins du Luxembourg. The 15eme is also filled with local brasseries, cafes and markets making it fun to explore. The flat was also a ten-minute walk from my first placement which was practical to say the least.

As most of my friends in Paris could speak English, I often found myself speaking English in social situations. Therefore, staying in a French-speaking flat really helped develop my French and learn new vocabulary and expressions.

### **Travel**

Getting around Paris is made easy by the various forms of public transport. I was lucky in the sense that I could walk to my first placement and I took the bus to my second base hospital. I therefore got the Navigo pass for the second half of my stay in Paris, which allowed me to use the metro, RER and buses. Having the pass is cheaper and more convenient to get around if using public transport on a daily basis. I would recommend getting one on the first day of the month.

### **My first placement**

My first placement was in the paediatric immunology and haematology department of l'hôpital Necker des Enfants Malades. This is a tertiary specialist paediatric centre in the 15<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. I would highly recommend trying to get a placement in this hospital if you are interested in paediatrics. The department I was in had an inpatient and outpatient department that dealt with rare genetic conditions that induced immunosuppression. Most inpatients were hospitalised for investigations and bone marrow replacement treatment. Although the conditions themselves were so rare that I will probably never come across them again, I was very happy with the placement.

Because of the Manchester exam schedule, I arrived approximately one month after the French medical students, which meant I missed the introductory lectures and induction. Although they were surprised by my arrival and wondered where I had been for the past month, they were very welcoming and quickly put me up to speed about the department and how it functions

My days usually started at 9 am. An MDT ward round took place every Monday morning with the ST6 and first year doctors during which I presented the patients that were under my care. Another longer MDT took place at the office every Thursday with the head of the department, nurses, occupational therapist, social worker etc. During this meeting, each medical student presented one of the patients under their care. This involved discussing the patient's history if they were new, investigations and results, current and future treatments and issues that needed to be discussed. This was an effective way of gaining a better understanding of the patient's condition as well as practicing my presentation skills.

The remainder of the week involved examining my patients on a daily basis, ordering investigations, checking their blood results, updating their paper dossier and phoning other departments for referrals or advice. The department also organised teaching for medical students every Friday morning, which was a really useful way to revise general paediatric concepts.

The team I was working with included two other medical students, two ST1s, one ST6, the head consultant as well as the department chief. Every member of the team was very welcoming and helpful. They were more than willing to explain how the French medical system worked, the role of medical students and any terms I did not understand. The other medical students were very nice, helping me out on the wards with tasks I did not know how to complete and inviting me to social events. I do however think that I was lucky with my team as I know that the team on the other side of the department weren't as thoughtful and hospitable to the other Erasmus student.

Although at the beginning I felt that the unit was too specialised and not very good preparation for a future FY1, it did help with important concepts of general paediatrics including nutrition, growth and development.

## **My second placement**

My blocks 7 and 8 were completed at l'Institut Curie in the medical inpatient department. This hospital is specialised in oncology and has various departments including surgery, radiotherapy, intensive care and palliative care. The department I was placed at was involved in caring for patients that required to be hospitalised either for chemotherapy, complications of their treatment or end of life management. The majority of the patients were palliative with metastatic disease and required management of different complications including pain, infection and confusion. The placement was emotionally draining as it involved looking after patients who were really unwell. It was especially difficult watching my patients deteriorate on a daily basis and pass away.

My placement usually started at 9 am with the daily hand over with the consultant, junior doctors, nurses and the palliative care team. We then proceeded to the ward round. The other medical students and I would usually divide the patient list amongst us which was a good way get to know my patients and follow their inpatient journey. Unfortunately the consultants in France aren't as inviting to let students examine during the ward round. A couple of weeks into the placement, I decided it was best to go see my patients alone and then present my findings to the doctor instead of standing and watching the ward round which can get very boring.

The remainder of the day involved performing the jobs generated for each patient during handover and ward round including ordering and reviewing investigations, calling other specialists and prescribing medications. Some days were rather dull and repetitive. The most interesting part of the placement was clerking new patients. This was a good opportunity to go see a patient on my own, take a history and examine them. I would then fill out the admission paperwork, present the case to my senior and we would then proceed to ordering the necessary investigations and prescriptions. It was also a good opportunity to revise different malignancies, their management and complications.

The educational department of the institute was very organised. On the first day they had a pack with information for each student. It took a couple of hours to sign all the necessary paperwork, get a badge and pick up a white coat. The institute also organised formal teaching once or twice a week for medical students to revise general concepts in oncology including the use of surgical methods, radiotherapy and chemotherapy to manage different cancers. This was helpful preparation for practice.

Although the placement was good, I did not feel as involved in the team compared to my first placement. The junior doctors switched during my placement which meant that they were too busy getting used to the department and their new job to take care of the medical students. This meant that some days I wasn't sure what to do or how to get involved. There were two other medical students on the placement: a third year and a final year. They were very welcoming and helpful. I did however notice that medical students in France are very hardworking and usually study several hours everyday.

The institute itself was in the 5<sup>th</sup> arrondissement just a few minutes walk from le patheon and jardins du Luxembourg. Rue mouffetard was also just around the corner, offering ample choice of restaurants and bars.

### **Medicine in the UK vs. France**

Medical schools in France select their students at the end of their first year from the results of 'un concours'. Less than half of the first year students progress to second year, and many chose to retake the first year in the hope of getting accepted the second time around. Their program is much more theoretical and lecture-based compared to UK medical schools. For instance, they don't have any formal bedside teaching during which examination and history taking skills are taught. They also do not receive communication skills teaching. As a result, they were stronger in terms of understanding the physiology and pathology of conditions but there was room for progress in

terms of practical skills. Medical students in years 3 to 6 are known as 'externes' whilst junior doctors are known as 'internes'.

Students were generally expected to be on placement every morning from 9 to 12 and then attend lectures in the afternoon but most of the students preferred doing their own revision after placement. Medical students have a specific role on the ward, which generally involves more secretarial jobs: finding documents, calling for results, noting down values etc. This is rather different to the UK where medical students are there for their own learning benefit. They are also expected to do A&E shifts no matter what placement they are currently on. The medical students definitely worked very hard, and studied on a daily basis all year long. This meant that they generally had little free time to socialise. Once they graduate from medical schools, junior doctors start working in the specialty they have chosen/been allocated.

In France, the concept of 'the doctor knows best' is still preponderant with patients not being as involved in their care compared to the UK. The sense of hierarchy is also much more obvious in the medical team. I also felt like the sense of privacy and confidentiality in adult medicine was not as respected in French hospitals. During my second placement, doctors would be discussing important medical information or breaking bad news with two patients in the room. The two beds were also separated by a small pull out curtain that was not always used during examinations. This was different from my experience in UK hospitals where patient confidentiality and privacy is taken very seriously. During ward rounds doctors would also pick up their phone whilst seeing a patient, which I thought was really disrespectful but perhaps French patients are used to this type of behaviour.

The way in which departments functioned was very similar to my placements in the UK with mornings involving daily handovers between doctors and nurses and daily ward rounds, whilst the afternoons involved the junior doctors performing the various tasks. They also worked closely with other healthcare departments and had daily specialist MDT meetings.

The dress code in French hospitals is definitely more casual. Junior doctors and medical students generally wear jeans, sneakers and t-shirts under their white coats. The coat was very useful for carrying handover notes, pens, and my stethoscope. I also enjoyed the fact that medical students were part of the team with a specific role in the team.

### **Linguistic Development**

Growing up in a French-speaking country, I already felt confident with my language skills. I do however feel that being in France and staying in a French-only speaking house helped further improve my language skills including everyday expressions and slang that I wouldn't have learned otherwise. I also learned new medical terminology from being on hospital placement and feel much more confident discussing medical cases in French.

I noticed however that the French are rather set on 'proper' French in the sense that they will correct mistakes you make. I did appreciate this as it helped me progress but it was annoying at times, especially in social situations.

### **Cultural experience**

The experience of living in Paris is absolutely incredible. There are so many museums, exhibitions, concerts, gardens and cathedrals to visit. During cold, rainy days I visited museums like the Louvre, Centre Georges Pompidou and Musee d'Orsay. What I enjoyed most, however, was walking around the city during sunny days. The different areas in Paris have a very different vibe that can only be truly appreciated on foot.

The university has a social organisation called AMPC (Amicale Medecine Paris Cordeliers) that organises events for medical students. I would recommend joining their facebook group if you are interested in their social events although I never attended one so I am unsure on how fun they are.

In terms of nightlife, Paris can satisfy all different tastes. Different areas have very different styles of cafes, bars and clubs.



I was also able to travel a little bit around France during my placement. There are several bank holidays during the month of May which is a great opportunity to travel. For instance, I visited the Mont Saint Michel, which was beautiful and a great way to get out of the city. We were lucky enough to have good weather over that weekend, allowing us to walk around and really discover the area.

### **Future Plans**

After my placement, I came back to Manchester in order to have the last few teaching sessions and my final portfolio review. I will be moving to London for my foundation year and, due to the large number of French people in London, I hope to continue practicing and developing my language skills. I also plan on heading back to Paris next year to visit the friends I made during my placement. I do not however think I would want to practice medicine in France as I prefer the British system.

Having spent four months in France, I would love to visit other French-speaking countries in Europe including Belgium and Switzerland.

### **Practical advice**

- Banks are closed on Mondays
- Many businesses and supermarkets are shut on Sundays
- Museums are free on the first Sunday of every month

### ***Nice spots***

- Rue mouffetard is filled with bars and restaurants
- St. Germain is really fun for nights out
  - o Tiger (rue Princesse) – Gin bar, great for cocktails
  - o La mangerie
  - o Chez Nous (rue Dauphine) – wine bar
  - o Le Hibou (Carrefour de l'odeon) – nice for chilled dinner and drinks
- During sunny days there are plenty of bars and cafes along the seine.

- Invalides/Pont Alexandre III: Le Flow, Faust
- Quai de la gare
- Parcs
  - Bois de Boulogne – beautiful parc
  - Parc des Buttes Chaumont

### *Placement*

- Practical skills in French hospitals (e.g. bloods, cannulas, catheters) are usually undertaken by nurses. I would highly recommend completing your UPSAs before going on placement
- Don't worry about packing clinical clothes!
- White coats will be provided by the hospital
- French hospitals still use a lot of paper notes and part of the medical students' job is to sort out the notes
- Join the Amicale Medicine Paris Cordeliers (AMPC) if you want to meet and socialise with French medical students.