



EUROPEAN STUDIES REPORT – MADRID 2016

Why European Studies?

I began learning Spanish at the end of primary school and continued it at secondary school. When it came time to choose my A-level subjects, even though I knew that I would be applying for a more science based course I couldn't leave Spanish behind.

Coming to Manchester gave me the perfect opportunity to combine both Spanish and medicine. Most of all I loved the opportunity that the European Studies course provided me with to spend four months in Spain, working in a Spanish hospital. We are always guided in the NHS by this concept of "best practice" and I thought it would be interesting to spend time in another country's health care system to see if the standards are the same there or if there are differences.

Despite the attraction of spending four months in the sunny south, I chose Madrid because during my trips to Spain over the years, I had never once been to the country's capital. I know that Granada is a lovely city, having been there on a school trip, but it is quite small compared to Madrid and, on a more trivial level, I already knew that I find it very difficult to understand the accent of Andalucia.

Experience of the placement and living in the city

- **Living in Madrid**

Being the largest city in Spain, there really is something to suit everyone in Madrid and living in and around the city centre is the perfect place to really experience the city. The centre of the city has plenty of interesting architecture while the surrounding "barrios" such as La Latina, with their narrow alleyways really give you that traditional Spanish street feel.

I was lucky enough to find a place in Moncloa which is quite a student based area due to the proximity of the Universidad Complutense campus. It was also about a 20 minute walk away from the main Gran Via street. In Madrid I don't think location really matters too much; the city is full of life wherever you go and the many metro and bus stops make travelling easy.

From a cultural point of view, Madrid has plenty of art museums such as El Prado and Reina Sofia. It's worth looking up timetables for these as sometimes on weekdays at non-busy hours you can get in for free. The Royal Palace and its surrounding gardens are also worth a visit but again check if there are times when you can go in for free. On a sunny day "El Retiro" park is something that can be enjoyed for free. With the park spanning well over a kilometre squared, there is something new to discover every time you visit it but the Botanic gardens and the boat pond, where you can rent a row boat out are some of the highlights.

For me, having the opportunity to go to Spain and eat Spanish food has always been part of the attraction of continuing to learn Spanish. Food obviously plays a very important role in Spanish culture and there is a wide variation of places to eat out at in Madrid. One of the nicest and most highly recommended places to go for tapas is the La Latina barrio. They have two main streets which are full of very typical tapas bars.

In terms of night life, there is always something going on in Madrid. On evenings after work, people tend to flock to their local bars for a caña or two before going home for dinner which means the bars and squares are always full in the evening time. The large student population means that there are Erasmus nights on most days of the week and at weekends the places that I would definitely recommend are Malasaña, Chueca and La Latina. Malasaña is quite a quirky and artistic area, with vintage shops, cocktail bars and even a bar with a beach downstairs. La Latina is a popular area among both Spanish and Erasmus students and, if you have time, look up one of the language exchanges in this area. They're usually held on weekdays and take place in a bar environment so you can meet new people and practice your language in a relaxed environment.

With Madrid being central there is plenty of opportunity for you to visit other places within Spain. There are trips organised by a company called Citylife which take you to the major cultural events happening throughout Spain as well as giving you an opportunity to visit different parts of the country. The trip I took to the "Las Fallas" festival in Valencia was one of my highlights. It's a massive public festival held once a year, where neighbouring barrios compete to build the best and most intricate wooden statue then at midnight they are all set alight. The only downside was the need to dodge constant firecrackers in the street, so it's not one for the faint hearted.

- **Hospital life**

Medicine in Spain seemed to adhere to norms of Spanish life in that it was very laid-back. Doctors usually begin between eight and nine o'clock in the morning and go home at three in the afternoon. From an outsider's perspective, I never had the feeling that there was any rush to get everything done and there was even time for at least two coffee breaks every day. The only downside to everything stopping at three in the afternoon is that doctors have to work about three on-call shifts every month. These periods are called "la guardia" and doctors whose turn it is to work them will come in in the morning, do their normal day, then continue to cover the ward all evening and into the night, until eight the next day when the new doctors come in. On particularly busy nights, this can mean that some doctors will work twenty four hours in one shift.

First rotation – Hospital Universitario La Princesa – Medicina Interna

I started off with my first rotation in Hospital Universitario de la Princesa. Located within a typical neighbourhood street and hidden by some of the flats around it, the hospital itself seemed quite small from the outside. Inside however, it spans eleven floors but is quite compact and difficult to get lost in and therefore suited me quite well.

The placement itself was definitely a good starter placement and served as an easy way to orientate myself to some of the practicalities of medicine in Spain. The "medicina interna" department was located on the ninth and tenth floors of the hospital. There are about ten Medicos Adjuntos who have two to three residents assigned to their team. During my month here I was assigned to one of these teams and spent every day with them. Each day would start at 8am with a clinical session, usually involving a case presentation. The doctors

would then return to the ward to deal with clerking the new admissions. They would then pass through the ward on a ward round to see all the patients under their care before returning to their office to discuss patients, medication changes and type up the notes. The day would finish anywhere between 2pm and 3pm. The vast majority of patients were elderly and would present with decompensated heart failure, pneumonia and UTIs. However, there were opportunities to see interesting cases such as a potential Wernicke's encephalopathy and an atypical presentation of peritoneal malignancy.

As this was my first placement I perhaps didn't get as much out of it as I could have done as I was still coming to grips with the language. The best advice I can give is to be proactive and ask questions. While the doctors I were with were friendly and tried to give teaching wherever they could, the Spanish way is to be direct and if you don't ask they will assume you already know.

Second rotation – Fundación Jiménez Díaz – Ginecología y Obstetricia

I completed my second rotation at Fundación Jiménez Díaz hospital which was located close to where I lived. Despite the convenience of living beside this hospital, this placement was definitely my most challenging. On my first day I was told to speak to a particular professor about my rotation. He hastily explained all the different areas I needed to go to then suggested I spent my first week in the delivery suite. After spending the first week in the delivery suite and on call with one of the residents I went and spoke to the professor that I had spoken to on the first day, as I had no clue where to spend the rest of my placement. He quickly passed me off to one of his nurses, who passed me on to someone else. Nobody seemed to be aware of who I was or where they could fit me in. I spoke to the UAM co-ordinator at the hospital and after she made a phonecall to the professor's secretary she was informed that someone else in the department was in charge of student rotations and this was who I needed to speak to. This was quite frustrating for me as this could very easily have been explained to me and saved me the hassle of going back and forward between people which wasted an entire day of placement.

As with the obstetrics and gynaecology speciality back home there are quite a large number of services provided by doctors within the hospital. These included outpatient clinics, surgery, ultrasound department, reproductive services and oncology. I was provided with a list of all these areas and told to go to a different one each day. For me this was rather daunting as I was not familiar with the hospital but once I got into the swing of things it became quite obvious that this was what the rotation entailed for students; going to a different department each day and asking permission to stay there.

If Obs and gynae is definitely a placement which interests you I would suggest asking to be assigned to one of the Adjuntos and follow their schedule as you can feel a bit lost just showing up to different departments every day and meeting many different doctors who don't have a chance to get to know you.

Third rotation – Centro de Salud, Reina Victoria – Medicina de familia

Medicina de familia is the rotation that I most enjoyed. The speciality of Medicina de Familia is the equivalent of our speciality of general practice. The Spanish “Centro de Salud” where the rotation is completed are slightly different to the GP practices in England. Depending on the size of the practice there can be anywhere between ten and twenty GPs working there alongside nurses, with more or less one nurse being assigned to each GP. In addition to this there is a Paediatric area, as up until the age of sixteen, children in Spain with day to day help problems will visit a Paediatrician as opposed to a GP. The Spanish sixth year students tend to dedicate the months of April and May completing their final assignment and studying for their exams so you will almost definitely not see them around at this time.

The placement involved me working one to one with two different GPs, depending on the day of the week. I would sit in on their consultations and listen to them take histories, look at blood results and help them to examine patients. The morning consultation would start just after 8am and last until just after 1pm. Each appointment block lasts for six minutes with the GP setting aside longer time for follow-up appointments. The short time block dedicated to patient consultations can make the morning surgery quite intense due to the sheer volume of patients that attend but the doctors often dedicated quick time between consultations to discuss the cases with me.

Fourth Rotation – Fundación Jiménez Díaz – Psychiatry

My final rotation was spent between psychiatry in a hospital setting and outpatient clinics for follow up on both adults and children.

Having already seen some elderly dementia patients being restrained on the ward I was concerned about what sort of things I would see in Psychiatry. However, the placement was overall very similar to Psychiatry back in England.

I spent my first week in a hospital setting working with a team of three doctors. They would spend their day seeing patients who had already been admitted to the ward, patients who were awaiting psych assessment down in A&E and medical outliers who needed a psych referral. The patients in the acute setting were very interesting as my short Psychiatry rotation at the start of fourth year did not give me much opportunity to see this acute side of things.

The rest of my time was spent in the outpatients department, reviewing patients who were stable. This side of the placement was not as engaging as the consultations were often very long and the patients were quite similar. However, the psychiatrists were always happy to explain things.

Differences in medicine in Spain and the UK

Having never spent time in a Spanish hospital before, I had a few doubts before starting my placement. Firstly, I was concerned about what I would need to wear. The truth is just about anything is acceptable; doctors there range from wearing the standard smart clothes we would wear in hospitals in Manchester, to the doctors who wear jeans and trainers. Initially

this concept was a bit alien to me so I elected to go with smart clothes until I had gotten a bit more used to the hospital and had gauged what was acceptable. Secondly, I had heard about this concept of “la bata”, essentially a white lab coat. I’m not sure if this is a standard all over Spain but it certainly was something that doctors and medical students alike wore in all the hospitals in Madrid. Luckily the hospital was able to provide one for me and it’s something that is definitely worth mentioning on your first day and explaining that the white coat is not worn in England.

As a Salford student, the importance of ANTT is something that has always been hammered into me, so needless to say I was in shock at how relaxed the rules regarding cleanliness were in Spain. I only saw doctors wear gloves to touch certain patients who had high risk infections. We would go from patient to patient without them gelling their hands. In addition to this, doctors would wear nail polish, rings and as many bracelets as they wanted. During one week were four out of our nine patients had phlebitis, I discussed these differences in hand hygiene with the team of doctors that I was working with. They acknowledged that hand hygiene probably could be better in the hospital but that it wasn’t a big concern.

In addition to this, medicine in Spain is still very paternalistic in the sense that doctors have a very high standing within society and their advice is trusted. Doctors will often begin to examine a patient without asking for their permission and I have seen even up to four doctors listening to a patient’s chest at once. Patients are not phased by this at all as it is the cultural norm but it took some adjusting for me.

The Spanish system of specializing is quite different from ours. Spanish medical students study for 6 years in total. After finishing with their degree in medical school, Spanish doctors dedicate several months to studying for the MIR exam which they sit around January. The score that they obtain in this exam ultimately decides what speciality and hospital they can enter into as oversubscribed specialities require higher points. After passing this exam and obtaining their place within a certain speciality, doctors work anywhere between 3-5 years (depending on the speciality) as a “Residente”. Upon finishing their time as a Resident, doctors are then eligible for a place as an “Adjunto” but this is not guaranteed.

How have I gained from this experience?

To begin with I was definitely not confident in my language ability, having not had Spanish classes for over 6 months before going on the placement. The first few weeks were challenging in this respect. However, the doctors were very understanding of this and if there was anything that I needed to hear repeated they were happy to do so. As the weeks went on and I became more accustomed to the rhythm and vocabulary of the hospital, I was pleasantly surprised how much my Spanish improved. There were also plenty of doctors I met along the way who were keen to practice their English skills on me. It was interesting to see that a lot of them were able to clearly read English without speaking it as most of the evidence based papers they read were produced in America or the UK and had not been translated.

I think one of the most important things that I learned was to lose my fear of getting things wrong. My concerns over language problems meant that for the first few weeks I didn't ask as many questions as I should have done for fear of not knowing the right vocabulary. Spanish people are very direct so if you are too afraid to ask anything and stand there in silence, they will assume you know so won't clarify.

In terms of future plans, I was able to use some of the placements as a guide to help me with choices regarding what career path I am going to take. The placements we were offered in Madrid were so varied that if there is something that you've never done before but interests you, now is the ideal time to take advantage of the opportunity and build your experience on an area of medicine that we may not have the chance to see in Manchester.

I think the Spanish way of life is definitely something to be envied and I would love the chance to be able to work in Spain again in future as a doctor.

Practical issues for future students

When you arrive in Madrid there are a lot of things that need to be done before you can actually start working on the wards and it is important to be aware of them.

Firstly you need to go out to the University's main campus (Cantoblanco) which is to the north of the city, to register as an Erasmus student. This is where they will give you the all important "Certificate of Arrival" which is absolutely vital for getting your Erasmus grant. Secondly you need to go to the medicine faculty (Facultad de Medicina) which is right beside La Paz hospital. This is where the differences in the bureaucracy in England and Spain really began to hit home. Don't be disheartened if it seems as though they don't really care that you are there or if they seem a bit disorganised, this is just how it is. The last place you need to go to is the "Area de docencia" of the hospital you are based at, essentially the equivalent of our undergraduate co-ordinators. When I got there panic ensued as I had not been put on the list and the secretary was not aware that I was coming. After watching her fluster for ten minutes, make an angry phone call to the International relations office and trying to blame me for the mistake she finally made one phone call to the "Jefa" of internal medicine and had it all sorted within a minute.

I know that some people find it useful to stay in a hostel or Air BnB until they get settled and start looking for a place. This is especially true as in the run up to finals, trawling through the internet on accommodation websites can be the last thing you want to do. However, if you are like me and like to have things sorted before you go, there are plenty of websites dedicated towards Erasmus students who are here for a short term. I got my flat through a website called ALUNI which is specifically tailored to students coming to Madrid from foreign countries. The website for this company and other accommodation sites is listed below.

In terms of travel, getting round the city is made extremely easy as a metro stop is never more than a five minute walk away. If you're fortunate enough to be under 25, the transport board offer a metro pass (called an abono) which provides unlimited metro travel

for 20 euro a month. This pass can be ordered online or there is an office in Moncloa metro station where you can go and they will produce it for you on the day.

In addition to this, on returning to Manchester there are often some loose ends which need to be tied up. It is possible to get UPSAs and WBAs done in Spain but they require a doctor who has quite a good understanding of English. I know that many of us left these sign offs to the last minute and it can be quite difficult to fit them into your last week so I would urge future students to have everything done before they go away.

On a final note, my main advice to future students is to just get stuck in. The four months I spent in Madrid have flown by and there are so many things I wish that I had the opportunity to do. The city is always full of life and there are so many Erasmus students as well as Spanish people to meet. On a rainy day in Madrid, it can be quite difficult to know that your friends are jetting off to tropical parts of the world on their elective. However, I think our understanding of the language as well as the extended time we get there, gives us a chance to really integrate into another country's way of life as well as gaining a better understanding of their culture.

Useful contacts

www.uniplaces.com

www.aluni.net

www.citylifemadrid.com