

European Studies Report (Berlin) 02.02.2016 – 20.05.2016



Contents Page

Why I chose to do European Option.....	p3
What I learnt and gained from the Experience.....	p3-4
Practical Information:	
What to do before arriving in Berlin.....	p4-6
What to do when you arrive.....	p6-7
Clinical placements in Berlin	
General overview.....	p7
Heart surgery.....	p.8
Haematology/Oncology.....	p8
A&E.....	p9
Paediatric surgery.....	p9 -10
Enjoying the city.....	p10-11
What to do when leaving Berlin.....	p11

Why I chose to do European Studies

I wanted the opportunity to further develop my German language skills as well as have the opportunity to work in a foreign medical system. Being half Swiss it was important to me to maintain and improve my German so that I could return to Switzerland or Germany to work in the future. Nothing compares to actually working with other German doctors and students in terms of getting an idea of how to go about applying for jobs or training in the country. The fact that we completed an internationally recognised language proficiency test (i.e. the Goethe certificate) will also be very useful for future job applications in Germany/Switzerland. I was also very keen to visit Berlin as I had heard that it was a great place to live. Berlin's culture and the history are also fascinating and there is no end to the areas you can explore and events you can attend.

What I have learnt and gained from the Experience

I found the experience of working in a different medical system to be invaluable. Examples of some negative aspects were that prescribing is not done nearly as thoroughly as in the UK (i.e. the prescription chart is not as detailed, there are no pharmacists that check the prescriptions on the ward), patient's do not always have wrist bands, and there is no formal meeting at the start of operations to check the patient, their allergies, etc. However, a more positive aspect in Germany was the efficiency and punctuality. Operations start promptly and early and lists usually ran to plan. There was also evidence of good teamwork and doctors were always very respectful and attentive. The hospitals themselves also functioned very well, e.g. transfers were prompt and bed availability was quickly sorted.

Another interesting aspect was that with the German efficiency came a tendency for them to be slightly abrupt (both to patients and to me). Initially I was offended by this and sometimes had the feeling that they were being slightly dismissive to the patients, but I think this style of communication is also engrained in their culture and most patients did not seem to mind or notice. Once I was aware not to take this personally it made interacting with colleagues much easier, albeit different to England where everyone is almost too polite. In spite of this, I found that generally there were good and considerate patient-doctor interactions.

Working in Germany I also noticed that the doctors did not write as much in the patient notes as they generally do in England. I think that the English system is better as everything is clearly documented in case of a future problem and it is also useful should nurses or doctors from other wards need to check on the patient.

I also struggled initially with the language aspect especially when switching between talking to doctors and to patients. Knowing whether to say 'du' or 'Sie' was also tricky. In certain cases it is obvious (e.g. patients and consultants always 'Sie' and fellow students 'du'). However with Fachärzte or Assistenzärzte it was not always as clear. I think that I improved a lot over the four months and this

distinction became more intuitive. I also learnt that the best thing to do was to speak as much as possible and not be afraid to make mistakes. The patients were rarely offended if I made a mistake when talking to them and the doctors didn't seem to mind either as long as I got the main point across.

It was also interesting to learn about the way in which German doctors undergo training. I.e. after their practical year (their final year of medical school) they apply directly to different hospitals for speciality training. For people who know what they want to do this is very convenient. However, personally I prefer the UK system where you get a chance to experience the working environment before having to choose your specialty. I think that if I were to return to Germany it would be after F2. Pay and working hours are also very similar in Germany to the UK which makes it an easy transition. However, they do sometimes have to do night shifts after a normal working day which I think is a bit too much.

I think there are some valuable lessons that I can take away with me and incorporate into my practice as a junior doctor such as efficiency, good teamwork and direct communication. However, noticing the lack of certain precautions in Germany (e.g. no group meetings at the start of operations, no double checking of prescriptions, less thorough documentation in notes) has also made me more aware of its benefit.

Practical Information

Things to do before arriving in Berlin

Apply for Erasmus funding

Emails will be sent out over the summer from the Erasmus Office explaining how to do this. You will get approximately 250 Euros per month but it's paid out in two instalments (one about 2 weeks after you arrive and another one towards the end of your placement).

Find a place to live

It is possible to do it on arrival but involves much more stress and it can take a week or two to find a place as Berlin is a very popular city and rooms go fast. The easiest thing to do is to try and make contact with Erasmus students already in Berlin (e.g. through Facebook - there's usually a group set up) or to look on the website www.wg-gesucht.de and try to organise Skype interviews. Air bnb has recently been banned in Germany so I think this will no longer be an option unfortunately.

There doesn't seem to really be any Charité accommodation that is available as far as I could tell from my research. There is some university accommodation but the waiting lists are very long and you can usually only get a room in September.

In terms of areas to live Kreuzberg, Prenzlauerberg, Mitte and Charlottenburg are all very central and good areas to live in but tend to be on the pricier side

(e.g. rent between 400-600 Euros). Charlottenburg is more gentrified and less diverse/cool but a safe and quiet place to live with good transport connections to the rest of the city. Kreuzberg and Prenzlauerberg are very hipster and tend to have more areas with good bars and restaurants. The area around Kotbusser Tor U-bahn in Kreuzberg is particularly popular for nights out and there are many bars around. Friedrichshain is also a good and cheaper area with lots of student and young families with lots of good areas to go out in and relatively close to the city centre.

Generally it doesn't really matter where you live in Berlin as long as you are close to a U-bahn or S-bahn stop as the whole city is very well connected by public transport. The S-bahn is an above ground train that runs in a loop around Berlin and the U-bahn is the subway which is very extensive. Your semesterticket in Berlin covers you for all transport in zones A, B and C.

Organise your Clinical Placement (Famulatur)

Usually the Erasmus office will organise your first Famulatur but the rest you have to do yourself and it's easier if you do this further in advance (i.e. October/November time) as you are more likely to get a placement you want. The easiest way to do is to find the secretary's email on the hospital website and email them as they usually deal with organising the Famulatur. They also like it if you attach a current CV with a picture.

The main campus Hospitals (i.e. Mitte, Virchow and Benjamin Franklin) are very popular so it's often hard to get a place there, so sometimes it's easier try one of the other associated Lehrkrankenhäuser (you can find a list of them at https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_akademischen_Lehrkrankenh%C3%A4user_in_Deutschland). Popular placements include Paediatrics and A&E so it's best to apply early if you want places in these specialities.

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT AT THE BURGERAMT (the local council)

Seriously, do this as early as you can. Log onto the website (<https://service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/120686/>) and make an appointment at any Burgeramt in the city (it doesn't have to be one in the area in which you plan to live). Appointments are difficult to get and without a Meldebescheinigung (i.e. confirmation that you have registered at a Burgeramt in Berlin) you can't get a permanent Studentenausweis or a Bank account in Berlin. Check the website and make sure you have the right forms before you go as they are quite strict. The type of appointment you need is the 'anmeldung einer Wohnung' and a list of the forms you need is on the webpage (<https://service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/120686/>). Check the website again shortly before you go as the rules often change (they had changed shortly before we arrived as well).

Pay your Semestergebühr for the University

This is approx 250 Euros (CHarité will email you about this) and keep proof of payment to present at immatriculation. It may seem like a lot but it also doubles as your public transport card for all of Berlin so it's a pretty good deal.

Do the online language test

This is sent to you from the Charité university. The test is short but can be quite tricky and you have to get at least 60% or you have to take the test again or take extra language courses whilst in Berlin.

On arrival

Register at a Burgeramt: once you have your permanent address (remember to take the forms mentioned above).

Buy a sim card: It's very easy to get a pay-as-you-go simcard with monthly bundles (e.g. data, calling etc). I chose Lyca mobile as it was quite cheap and paid 10 Euros a month for data and occasionally topped up credit so that I could call/text).

Opening a bank account: most banks (deutsche bank, Post bank, Sparkasse) offer free accounts for students. You need your studentenausweis, passport and meldebescheinigung in order to open a bank account. Its not essential to open a bank account (you can get by by taking money out periodically from your English account) but I found it easier than paying transfer fees each time I took out money.

Betriebsarzttermin (appointment with occupational health): you have to have one of these before you can start your placement. For us Nikola Lepom organised the appointments for us and sent us an email telling us where to go and at what time (usually the appointments are at the Virchow Campus). Make sure you bring an envelope with your address and a stamp as they need this to send you your results.

Immatriculation: What to bring with you: passport (plus photocopy), copy of EHIC card, proof of university fees payment, Erasmus certificate of arrival (you can print this off the 'my placement portal', a copy of your Burgeramt meldebestätigung (if you don't have the meldebestätigung yet you can also bring it by the immatriculation office at a later date – you will be issued with a temporary student card until you provide a meldebestätigung). Nikola Lepom meets you in the morning and helps you fill out the immatriculation form and makes sure you have all the correct documents. She also signs your Erasmus certificate of arrival and sends it back to Manchester University (you need this signed in order to receive your Erasmus grant). You then go across to the Charité Immatriculation Office on the other side of the campus (by the Student Mensa) and give in the forms and photocopies of the documents. You will usually be issued with a temporary Studentenausweis until you present your meldebescheinigung and are then given a permanent Studentenausweis that also counts as your Berlin transport ticket. The immatriculation Office isn't open every day so make sure you check the opening times before you go (when we were there it was open all day Tuesday and half day Thursday and Friday).

Erasmus: find and join the facebook group for Erasmus students at the Charité in Berlin. The Erasmus club is always hosting events and the other Erasmus students are usually all very friendly and keen to meet up.

Clinical Placements (Famulatur)

General overview

Forms: You will be given a Famulatur Certificate that you have to get filled out at the end of each placement for the Charité along with an eform for Manchester that needs to be filled out. Often the secretary can fill out the Famulatur Certificate for the Charité but you need a doctor to fill out the Manchester eform.

Kittels: Doctors still wear white coats (Kittels) in Germany so it's worth buying a Kittel on arrival (there's a book shop on the Mitte campus called Lehmanns where you can buy one and it costs about 25 Euros). Some placements will give you one (especially the private hospitals) but not all so it's worth finding out whether they do or not. Depending on the ward the doctors sometimes also wear different coloured scrubs under their Kittel but generally as a student you can just wear your own clothes under your Kittel. Clothes don't have to be as smart as in the UK (e.g. you can wear jeans and trainers).

Starting times: Be warned the Germans are very punctual and everything starts early so if you are on surgery you can expect to start between 7 and 7.30 and if you are on a medicine placements start time is usually 7.30 to 8. Finish time depends on the ward but is usually when the work is done which can be early if you are lucky (e.g. once I finished at 2) but equally can also be late (e.g. neurology is very notorious for finishing times as late as 7pm sometimes).

Equipment (e.g. cannulas and blood taking equipment) is pretty similar in Germany which is handy as you will spend a lot of your time taking blood and placing cannulas. Generally your role as student on a Famulatur is to take the bloods in the morning, go on rounds or into theatre and then help with the new patient clerkings in the afternoon. Careful that you don't get lumbered with too many bloods to do and try to find other students on the ward to help you out. Generally other students will either be Famulaturins (i.e. German or foreign medical students doing a placement in their holidays) or a Praktisches Jahr (PJ) Student (a German student in their final year). Praktische Jahr students function like Junior doctors and have a contract with the hospital (but are usually not paid). They do all the work of a junior doctor without prescribing. German students go straight into speciality training after graduating from university so the PJ students are the junior doctor equivalents and are usually very friendly and helpful.

Try to find out if the PJ students have teaching sessions (called Fortbildung sessions) and ask if you can go along as these can be quite good. Usually there is one a week.

UPSAS/UCXS: My advice is to get all of these done before going out to Germany (which is what I did) and is easy to do as long as you plan in advance. It probably wouldn't be too tricky to do in Germany but does involve more hassle.

My first placement: Heart surgery at Charite Mitte

The heart surgery team is for the most part very friendly. A couple of the Oberärzte (consultants) are a bit intimidating but generally you tend to deal with the Fachärzte (registrars) and Assistantsärzte (SHOs) who are very laid back and keen to teach and involve you. The heart surgery team is quite small at Mitte (there is only one Assistantsarzt) and so they don't usually have very many bloods to do in the morning or patients to clerk in the afternoon. This is convenient if you want to spend lots of time in the operating room and the surgeons are very keen to involve you in this and you get a lot of opportunities to help with vein harvesting in CABG operations and suturing. They also taught us how to use the echo machine and we could help with the post-op TTEs which was very interesting.

For me it was a little difficult to get lots of time in theatre as there were two other Famulants there at the same time as me (from Austria) and a PJ student who also wanted to do surgery. Since only one of us could assist in theatre it meant that we had to take turns and so on days where you weren't able to go into theatre it could be quite boring as there was never much to do on the wards. But eventually we also found other things to do e.g. joining the cardiology ward rounds. As there were never many clerkings to do in the afternoon (maximum 4) you can often finish quite early (e.g. around 2 or 3) if you don't go into theatre in the afternoon.

Contact: The doctor in charge of students is Prof Dohmen and a list of the doctors and contact details is here:

<http://herzchir.charite.de/klinik/mitarbeiter/>

Haematology and Oncology at Campus Mitte

This was an good placement with a friendly team of doctors. Generally the day started at 7.30 with taking bloods, then a radiology meeting at 8.15 and then morning ward rounds. The whole team went for lunch together at the student canteen (very cheap food – you could usually get a hot meal for under 3 Euros!). The afternoon was spent clerking patients and writing discharge letters and generally I would finish around 4.30/5. There was a lot of opportunities to practice skills such as venepuncture and cannulation and I was also able to assist with bone marrow biopsies. Although a lot of the chemotherapy regimes were quite complicated the doctors were very keen to explain whenever I had questions and things started to make more sense after a couple of weeks on the ward. Most of the patients on the ward had lymphomas or leukemias but there were also occasionally patients with other metastasized cancers (e.g. pancreatic, breast and bowel) so there was quite a variety when it came to clerking patients. I was also the only Famulantin on the ward so there was always things for me to do.

Contact: Dr Schulz carsten-oliver.schulz@charite.de

Rettungstelle at Benjamin Franklin

This was by far my favourite placement as I was able to do so much and the team of doctors in A&E at Benjamin Franklin were really friendly and encouraging. Whereas on the other placements I had the feeling I was more of a blood-taking assistant, on this placement I felt more part of the team and that my role was actually helpful. As a student on A&E you can clerk all the incoming patients (except the ones going straight to RESUS) which includes taking a full history, examining, siting a cannula and taking bloods. You then have to enter everything that you've done into the A&E form on the computer (which is good practice for medical German as you type up the whole history and the examination findings) and hand it over to the doctor. Afterwards the doctor usually discusses the investigation and management plan with you and you go back and see the patient together. If there is an acutely unwell patient going in to RESUS you can also go along and assist.

Once you are on A&E the work is non-stop (i.e. no breaks and if you want food you have to bring it with you and eat it whilst you type in the doctors room) but you work in shifts and usually get to leave on time. When I was there I had to coordinate the shifts I did with the other students (i.e. they didn't want all the students there on the same shift). You can chose from doing the early shift (7.30 to 16.30) the middle shift (11 to 20.00) or the late shift (15.00 to 22.30) and if you want you can do a night shift (22-08:30) but you don't have to. I did one night shift just to see what it would be like and it is quite good but very dependent on the doctors working there and what type of patients come in.

Contact: Marion Schwarz (secretary): marion.schwarz@charite.de

Paediatric Surgery at St Joseph's Krankenhaus

The paediatric surgical team at St Joseph's is very small and comprises of one Chief Consultant and 4 consultants. There weren't any registrars or junior level doctors, which I at first found strange as on other placements you rarely had anything to do with the consultants as a Famulantin and mostly reported to the registrars or juniors. However, the consultants were all very friendly and eager to include me so this turned out not to be an issue at all. Elective surgeries were carried out on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday and were usually orthopaedic or urological with a couple of congenital malformations (e.g. anal atresia) as well. Usually there were 2 or 3 operations on each of these days. I was allowed to assist in many of these operations which was interesting and a good learning experience. Tuesdays and Thursdays were clinic days and I was also allowed to help in these. Emergency operations such as appendicectomies and broken bone management could also happen at any point on any of the days.

When not in surgery or in clinic I would be in the A&E department helping to clerk surgical paediatric patients. As there is another very large hospital nearby (Neuköln) we did not get that many patients so often the day would pass quite slowly if there were no surgeries or clinics. Most of the patients we saw were children with fractures, burns, wounds and query appendicitis.

The cafeteria is subsidized so it is quite cheap (i.e. you can get a meal for under 3 Euros) and has a very good salad bar but the cooked food is not that special.

I would thoroughly recommend this placement if you are interested in paediatrics or surgery as you get a lot of one on one teaching time with expert consultants and the hospital is a very friendly and relaxed environment.

Contact: Frau Boler (Secretary): Henning.Giest@sjk.de

Enjoying the City

Nights out in Berlin

Good areas to go on a night out in Berlin are Kreuzberg (the area around Kotbusser Tor and Oranienstrasse), Neuköln (has a lovely rooftop bar called Klunker Kranich - but be warned we had to queue for almost an hour to get in on a warm sunny evening) and Friedrichshain (there are lots of good bars and restaurants around Boxhagener Platz and near the Ubahn stop Warschauer Strasse).

Falafel and Kebab stands are also hugely popular but one of best (and also very cheap) kebab stands is Mustafa Gemüse Kebab Stand in Kreuzberg by the Mehringdamm Ubahn station. You might have to queue for 40 minutes to an hour but it's worth the wait!

Cafés and Brunches: Berlin has a lot of excellent Cafés and weekend Brunches are definitely a refined institution (i.e. if you want to go to a good place for brunch on a weekend you have to reserve a table in advance). Some good cafés are Barcomi's in Kreuzberg (great cake selection), Ungeheuer in Neuköln (good hipster brunch), Lula Deli Deluxe in Schöneberg (excellent hot chocolate and good brunch) and Fatma & Frieda in Neuköln (also very good brunches with a middle eastern flare).

Touristy things to do in Berlin

Museum Island: There are some very good and famous museums here and they are cheap for students (usually 5 euros or less entry). Other good museums in Berlin are the DDR museum (small but very interactive and interesting), the Jewish Museum and the Jewish memorial site museum (free!).

Brandenburg Tor and Reichstag Dome: This is a very worthwhile experience and it's free! You have to register in advance to visit the dome (either online or in person at the Reichstag) and on weekends it can get very booked up. There is a free audio guide as you walk up the dome which is very good and explains the buildings you can see from the dome as well as a bit about the Reichstag itself.

The Jewish Memorial site: This memorial site is very well done and close to the Brandenburg Tor. It also has a free museum on the far end.

East Side Gallery: this is the longest remaining section of the Berlin wall and has many panels with famous artworks/graffiti. It's near the U-bahn stop Warschauer Strasse on the U1 line.

Soviet memorial in Treptower Park: this is a very impressive memorial and worth a visit. The park is also very nice in spring as it's right next to the Spree river.

Sachenshausen: I did not personally have time to go here but this is one of the old concentration camps and is easily accessible by U-bahn if you are interested in visiting.

The Sunday Flea market at Mauerpark (Prenzlauerberg): this is a very large and popular flea market with many stands and they also have live karaoke sessions in the summer!

Wannsee and Grünewald: this is the large lake out the west of the City which is very nice to go to on a sunny day and there are also lots of walks that you can do around the area and castles to visit. The Wannsee also has a Strandbad with real sand (a 15 min walk from the S-bahn stop Nikolassee).

Potsdam: This is a short ride away on the S-bahn and is on the other side of the Wannsee. Potsdam is a very important city historically and has a lot of old impressive buildings and a beautiful garden belonging to the Schloss Sanssouci (former summer residence of the king of Prussia) which is much bigger than the famous Charlottenburg garden in Berlin.

Day or weekend trips from Berlin: cities worth visiting nearby are Hamburg, Leipzig, and Dresden and these are all accessible via bus or train. It is really nice to rent a bike in Dresden and cycle along the river Elbe if you visit on a sunny day. Prague is also only 4.5 hours away by bus.

Leaving Berlin

Make an appointment at the Bürgeramt to abmelden: It may seem pointless but you need proof that you have deregistered from your local council in order for Berlin to transfer your transcript to Manchester.

Make an appointment with Angelika to hand in your Famulatur Certificates. Make sure you get an Erasmus attendance certificate signed by the Erasmus office in Berlin.

Do the online language test and report sent to you by Erasmus