

Year 5 European Option Student Report

Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz, Madrid

Universidad de Autónoma

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Why did I chose to study with the European Option?

I chose to do European Option because I love languages and the doors it can open, especially when travelling. I previously lived in France and I was bilingual, so learning Spanish at school seemed a sensible option, as French would aid my learning of a second Latin-based language. I decided to apply to Manchester for several reasons, one of which was for the languages option, which isn't available at any other UK university, and the opportunity ability to travel and experience medicine in a different country. Throughout medical school, I attended Spanish classes and masterclasses, I did my homework and reading up – all for the opportunity to spend time in Madrid.

So was it all worth it? In a word: yes. Although it does involve some extra work, extra motivation and sometimes extra organisation, it is all worth it! Instead of spending just 2 months on an elective, I got to go for 4 blocks (5-8) which definitely makes up for having to stay in Europe. Learning Spanish alongside medicine gives me a slightly different degree (MBChB with European Option) and has strengthened my language skills. As a bonus, I got the opportunity to spend 4 wonderful months in Madrid, a beautiful and vibrant city that everyone should experience at some point in their life. The placements were reasonably laid back but interesting and helpful for my medical knowledge and my Spanish. I loved experiencing a different culture, even if it was at times frustrating (Madrid is as relaxed as they say!), but I wouldn't change this experience for the world, and neither should you.

Overview of living and working

When choosing which hospital I wanted to go to for my rotations, location was everything. I wanted to live in the very centre of Madrid in order to experience the Spanish capital. I was very lucky to get my first choice: Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz. It was as close to central as I could have hoped for. Next decision was rotations: I chose to do my placements in general medicine and in fields which particularly interested me—paediatrics, internal medicine, neurology and emergency medicine.

Another thing that attracted me to Madrid was the weather – a little different to Manchester! Although it is quite chilly in January and February, often around freezing, it gets over 30° in May, with long days of sunshine and little rain. This means there is plenty of time to experience the city after the hospital, especially with the Spanish sentiment that there is no such thing as 'late'.

Before leaving for Madrid, trying to find accommodation was difficult—I had no idea where the no-go areas were, how long it would take to get across town, which method of transport would be best or what price was acceptable. Even looking through advice forums didn't give me the information I was looking for. Instead, I decided to play it safe and book some temporary accommodation for the first 2 weeks, until I could stabilise myself in the city and find somewhere more permanent.

We lived in the temporary accommodation as a group of 7 from Manchester in a flat in Palos de La Frontera, along the same metro line as the hospital I had my placements in. Whilst staying there, I found a more permanent flat – living close to the city centre in an area called “Huertas”, well known for its bars and restaurants. I lived with 2 other Manchester students and 4 international students and I felt that I got to really live the Erasmus experience. I would recommend joining Facebook groups and housing sites and visiting a lot of flats before choosing.

The first week day was spent trying to get our arrival forms signed – this involved going to the university (far on overground train) then to the main medical school at Hospital La Paz (far from where we were staying) and then to the hospital we were based at. And all before 2pm - before the offices closed, to ensure we wouldn't be taking 2 days to get the signatures we needed!

The following day was our first day on placement, I was starting on paediatrics. My first task was to track down the ‘jefe’, Dr. Leandro Guillen, so that I could introduce myself and find out my timetable. After waiting outside his outpatient's room for over an hour, a doctor comes past and swoops in to talk to him, for me only to realise that he didn't have a patient in the room at all! Luckily, he was a lovely doctor who gave me a rough schedule for the next four weeks, starting on paediatric A&E, then moving onto the ward, to neonates and finally outpatients.

The first few days were a struggle– my Spanish was slow to get off the ground. Some doctors cared more about helping me than others, and some had such strong accents I could barely understand them! I started to settle in and become known to the majority of the doctors. I enjoyed my time on the ward, I especially liked my time on neonatology. I spent the mornings examining the new born babies and afternoons helping or watching the nurses with the premature babies.

My next placement was in Internal Medicine with Dr. Lu s Cubero. I didn't know what to expect from this placement, not having a similar speciality in the UK, but the team were lovely and included me from the very first day. The patients under their care were scattered all over the hospital (good exercise) and the view of Madrid from the ‘despacho’ was spectacular. Cases were varied, ranging from gout to pneumonia to diabetes complications, and patients were usually elderly. It was a great placement to practise examination skills and to improve my Spanish– the ‘adjunto’ was keen to teach me all the rude words he could!

Neurology was up next, on the fifth floor of the hospital. It was a slow start, no doctor would let me start until I had spoken to the boss (‘jefe’, Dr. Serratosa). He proved difficult to find and upon meeting him, had no idea that I was arriving (despite the numerous emails I'd seen sent to him). The next few days sped by, and I quickly became accustomed to the 8am starts and the many ward rounds, seeing interesting cases every day and getting to chat to all the doctors about findings or differential diagnoses. I felt that this placement was extremely useful for neurology revision. I was often told to go and take a history and examine a patient so as to present them back to the doctor along with any differential diagnoses. Several of the patients were without prior diagnosis and so were very interesting to review.

My last placement was in A&E at the same hospital. Two other Manchester students had rotated in the department before me, so I had heard a lot about who were the useful medics to be with and about the amount of time we were expected to be in. I was introduced to the ‘jefe’ (Dr. Blanco) who showed me around and introduced me to the ‘adjuntos’ of the department. I was allowed to

examine and discuss patients with both junior and senior doctors, as well as look at patient notes and suggest investigations and diagnoses. It was an excellent placement for revision of medical knowledge and I would thoroughly recommend it.

For Easter, we had a week off placement. I would highly suggest making the most of this week, seeing more of Spain or exploring more of Madrid and its outskirts. I spent the week travelling around the south of Spain, in the province of Andalucía and I can't recommend it more. It is beautiful, unique and extremely hot, even in early April. I also managed to enjoy some weekend trips, including to Salamanca, Ávila, Segovia, Toledo and Valencia. See Spain while you can!

Similarities and differences in Medicine

During my time in the hospital in Madrid, I noticed several similarities in the care of patients. Firstly, that medical professionals of all levels work together in teams within each speciality, consisting of several junior doctors, a few middle grades and only one or two consultants. I found nurses to be very helpful both to me as a student and to other healthcare professionals. Whilst on my placements, I found that medical teams tend to do a quick board round before seeing patient on the ward round, which is similar to the hospitals I've worked at in the UK.

As a medical student, at first I found it difficult to explain to doctors the level of my training and the work load we are given on wards in the UK, where medicine is a lot more clinically based. During several of my placements, after showing my competence with patients, I was able to talk to and examine patients by myself and then present the patient to the doctors. This proved to be a great opportunity to improve my language skills, as well as helping to maintain my medical knowledge.

Another similarity that I noticed and enjoyed were the weekly "sesiones", where an interesting medical case or patient would be discussed in front of the team, with questions from the audience. This proved both stimulating and engaging. It encouraged the use of my medical knowledge while also greatly improving my Spanish listening skills, as the presenting doctors were from all over the Spanish speaking world, including South America.

From my experience in a Spanish hospital, I think medicine is much more paternalistic than in the UK; there is less of a focus on communicating decisions and information to the patient. For example, a young patient came into A&E with chest pain and, after all serious diagnoses were ruled out, was discharged home without knowing the cause of his chest pain. I sat down with the gentleman, who was anxious, and explained it was muscular and that it wasn't a heart attack or respiratory problems, for which he thanked me greatly.

Ward rounds were often preceded by board rounds. In Madrid, there was a heavy reliance on the computer system that was used. Doctors would regularly change treatments or order investigations based on the information logged into the computer, without seeing the patient beforehand. Each ward round involved a lot of walking as patients were scattered around the hospital, never on a set ward. Often, there were patients known as 'interconsultas' to see—patients under a different medical team who needed to be seen due to concomitant medical problems—who could be on any ward in the hospital.

Relatives of the patient were often present during ward rounds, as there was no set time for visiting, and were more involved in patient care than I am used to seeing in the UK. Often, ward rounds

would involve long discussions with relatives after seeing each and every patient. This obviously drew out the ward round process. While on ward rounds, I noticed that doctors rarely examine patients and take very brief histories. This is even the case with a newly admitted patient; doctors rely heavily on previously documented information, imaging and blood test results.

While on my placements, we had to wear white lab coats over our clothes as part of the 'uniform'. This highlighted the different attitude in Spain to infection control. Unlike in the UK, there was no 'bare below the elbows' rule, doctors and nurses wore jewellery and watches and it was common for staff with long hair to have it loose. Although alcohol gel dispensers are scattered around each department, hand hygiene was of less importance than in the UK. Staff rarely washed their hands unless they were visibly dirty and would only use hand gel if an infectious patient was examined.

While on A&E, I noticed a large number of patients came to the hospital instead of waiting to see their GP. It was very common to see patients with otalgia or a common cold, who did not want to wait to see their GP in the community, safe in the knowledge that they would be seen within a matter of a few hours if they go to hospital. This seems a waste of resources for the health care system and the efficiency of the hospital itself. Upon mentioning this problem to several doctors, they also seemed exasperated by it. This has highlighted the importance of public education about the healthcare system and the use of advertising the levels of healthcare and when to use each, as is done in the UK.

The working patterns and medical training were different to in the UK. Medical students do not attend the hospital often, spending as little as 3 days in each speciality. The working schedule for junior doctors is 8-3 on a normal Monday to Friday, with up to 7 'guardías' in a month – a 24h on call shift. In terms of training, straight out of medical school, every doctor must sit an examination, for which many spend over a year revising, the results of this exam then rank the candidates. The highest scoring candidate gets their top choice job, and the available roles are filled in this way. The first post for junior doctors is straight into a speciality, which they will train in for 4-5 years as part of their residency. After the training, they must try and find a job as an 'adjunto'. If they are unsuccessful, they either have to wait until an appropriate role is available, which may mean some time unemployed, or they must re-sit the examination and start training in a different speciality.

What did I gain from my time in Spain?

Both personally and professionally, I feel like my experience working in Spanish hospitals has taught me a vast amount. Firstly, it has been reinforced that communication skills are key – they improve patient understanding and adherence to treatment, and progress the relationship between healthcare professionals. A patient can be left very anxious about something insignificant because they have not had the opportunity to ask a question or to be listened to.

Secondly, and importantly (), I have learnt to be far more patient. This was crucial considering this placement was done in Spain - a country known to be relaxed. I grew to understand the workings of a Spanish hospital and the time involved to do certain things, as well as the 'mañana' culture. I became accustomed to offices and shops closing at 2pm for 'siesta' and having to wait until the next day to complete tasks. I think this will improve my efficiency when I start working, as I am now used to rearranging my time around strange office or shop hours.

I feel that I am now more aware of the difficulty that can be involved if the patient and doctor do not speak the same first language and the patience this involves. I think this will impact my practice in the future with respect to foreign patients and will improve me as a doctor. This has also encouraged me to continue to develop my Spanish, and to use it when possible in the future.

Moving on to Spanish culture: I love it. Yes, it was frustrating that everything in the city stopped for an afternoon snooze every day and that it usually took twice the time to do something as simple as get a signature. At the same time, it was amazing. I learnt to be a lot more relaxed and efficient. Siestas are great and necessary, considering the Spanish nightlife culture of clubbing until dawn. Spanish food is amazing and life is relatively cheap in Madrid, considering it is a capital city.

Practical issues for future students

Recommendations for future students travelling to Madrid:

-Book temporary accommodation

This gave me time to find a flat in a great location for a decent price and was worth paying the little bit extra. It meant I had time to settling in to the city and into my placement whilst looking for somewhere more permanent, knowing where I wanted to live and how much I wanted to pay. I used AirBnB, which I would recommend.

-Get a metro card

This card covers many types of transport throughout the city including the metro, cercanías (overground trains) and buses within the city. Overall, it saves a lot of money. You can pick up this card at various metro stops and 'estancos' (tabacco shops) around the city, however some require you to have made a prior appointment. If you want to be efficient, you can book an appointment before arriving in Madrid ([link in recommendations](#)).

-Relax and go with the flow

Try not to get frustrated with the 'siesta' culture, enjoy it while you are there- sleep is precious! Expect everything to close at 2pm and be pleasantly surprised if it's still open.

-Go early to get the most out of placements

To get the most out of your first placement, I would suggest arriving several days before so that you have some weekdays free to sort out your arrival certificate without it eating into your time on the ward. On the first day of each placement, find the 'jefe' and introduce yourself, get a rough idea of your schedule on the placement and what they expect from you. Inform them at this time that you will need to meet with them twice throughout the placement to complete the MedLea forms and get them to check their email! Once you have got the placement signed off, print out the MedLea form, take it back to the 'jefe' and get him to sign it and stamp it. This is how you must get your placement signed off and is how you will get your departure form at the end of your stay.

-Travel and see more of Spain (or even Portugal and Morocco if you have the time)

While you're in Spain, make the most of it! It is relatively cheap to travel around the country and there are even reasonably priced trips to Portugal or Morocco (although I didn't have time to do this). There are several companies that cater especially to Erasmus students, which organise trips around Spain and beyond for a decent price- but expect to look like a tourist!

-Bring a laptop

I did not bring my laptop with me, and so spent a lot of time asking flatmates to borrow theirs or going to dodgy internet cafes (NB: Casa Encendida in Embajadores gives you 2 free hours of internet use, it is clean and has aircon!). I would recommend taking a laptop, if possible, so as to be able to complete the many forms required for starting FY1 and to complete your portfolio.

-Encourage visitors

I would definitely say that it is important to encourage visitors whilst you are in Madrid, its fun to show people around and enjoy the city with friends and family. Be careful not to book away all your weekends though, you still want time to travel around Spain yourself!

-Don't expect to make Spanish medical student friends

Generally, the Spanish medical students have much shorter rotations throughout the specialties and have set timetables about where they should be every day. I found that they most often kept to themselves, that I would have to start any conversations and that they often thought I was a resident.

-Embrace Erasmus

After reading the above point, I think it is important to embrace Erasmus. Meet students from all around the world and join in with parties all over the city. Its great fun and you can make life-long friends from awesome places, which gives you an excuse to plan more trips to visit them.

-Get a Spanish phone (with Whatsapp!)

For some reason, Whatsapp is huge in Spain. I often found that I couldn't get through to people by calling or texting, and would only get a response through Whatsapp. I would recommend getting a Spanish sim too, it saves a lot of money in the long run.

Useful addresses & numbers

- **Emergency Services:** 112
- **Insurance:** I got my phone stolen! It was a sad day but I would recommend keeping the little card with the insurance details that the university gives you before you go away- it works and is very helpful!
RSA insurance covers you and is paid and organised by the university.

- www.rsagroup.com
 - **Smart Insiders:** a company that organises trips especially for Erasmus students with a budget.
www.smartinsiders.com
Telephone: +34914938978
Email: info@smartinsiders.com
 - **Erasmus Student Network:** a similar company. Worth finding the Madrid Facebook page to stay up to date with upcoming trips and events.
www.esnucm.org/
Telephone: +34913943977
Avenida de Puerta de Hierro, 28040 Madrid, Spain
Email: info@esnucm.org
 - **ErasmusFlat:** I rented my flat through ErasmoFlat, who I would heartily recommend.
<https://es-es.facebook.com/erasmoflat> or www.erasmoflat.com
Telephone: +34655501301
Calle Fuencarral 22, 2°C, 28004, Madrid, Spain
 - **AirBnB:** a large selection of accommodation all over the world, I used it to book temporary accommodation in Madrid until I could find a suitable flat and also used it to find accommodation whilst travelling.
www.airbnb.com
 - **Casa Encendida:** a social and cultural centre in Embajadores that lets you use their computers for free for up to 2 hours a day. Much nicer and cleaner than 'locutorios'! Also has art and theatre exhibitions.
Telephone: +34902430322
Ronda Valencia 2, 28012 Madrid, Spain
 - **Metro card:** through this link, you can see the various prices for using the metro, including the monthly pass, and book an appointment to get yourself a metro card.
https://www.metromadrid.es/en/viaja_en_metro/tarifas/abonos/contenido04.html
Alternatively, you can look up where the cards are sold throughout the city and try without an appointment.

Madrid Metro and Cercanías Map:



Source: https://www.metromadrid.es/en/viaja_en_metro/red_de_metro/planos/index.html



Source: https://www.metromadrid.es/en/viaja_en_metro/red_de_metro/planos/index.html