

Evaluation EFIM Exchange
Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge, Barcelona, Spain
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As a participant of the EFIM Exchange program I have worked at the department of Infectious Diseases of Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge in Barcelona, Spain. This academic hospital consists of a general hospital and a special oncological-hematological hospital: Institut Catala d'Oncologia (ICO). ICO is one of the leading oncological institutes of Catalunya to which patients from a wide region are referred to

At ICO, a team of infectious diseases (ID)-specialists is available for co-treatment if an infectious complication develops. The team is consulted for almost every patient who has a fever or an infection. As the residents in oncology and hematology have no internal medicine working experience (the residency consists just of oncology or hematology), problems regarding general internal medicine are also discussed with the ID- team.

This team works mainly on the hematological ward but also visits the oncological ward and day clinics. For one month I was part of this team that consists of one infectious diseases specialist and two Spanish residents in internal medicine.

Professor Ramon Pujol, working at the department of Internal medicine, coordinated my visit. He arranged a position in the infectious diseases team mentioned above, after asking for my preferences by email some months before my arrival.

However, until the morning of my arrival, the supervising ID specialist was not aware of my exchange. Fortunately, she was happy to have me in her team.

The focus of this particular ID-team is on infections in immune-compromised patients. Therefore the internship complemented my residency in The Netherlands. The level of medical knowledge that was required matched my level.

When visiting the patients, the ID-team was always complete (sometimes with the specialist, sometimes without her). Hence it was always possible for me to discuss a problem with the other residents. I think this is essential for an internship abroad as this allows the foreign intern to adjust to the local habits regarding diagnostic procedures and treatments. Furthermore, as the consulting team does not have daily responsibility for the patients and the administrative work was limited, there was enough time to spend with patients, discuss cases and study.

The practicalities of the internship regarding access to the building and a staff pass were well organized. I did not have a personal code for the IT-systems but this was not a necessity. The Bellvitge also has experience with residents from other hospitals. During my internship I worked with a resident from another hospital in Catalunya, who was doing an internship at ICO for four months.

A challenging part of my internship was the language barrier. I followed a Spanish course, but it is still difficult to understand the conversations, especially with doctors. The infectious diseases specialist (my supervising specialist) and residents spoke Spanish amongst each other and to me. However, I often did not fully understand the conversations. The willingness to speak English was limited, possibly because the average level of English of Spanish doctors is of lower level than in northern European countries. I found it difficult to ask them for a translation regularly, therefore I sometimes missed out on important information. This was a negative influence on my learning curve.

Furthermore, in Catalunya most people prefer to speak the Catalan language (which is strongly related to Spanish, but challenging to understand if you don't speak Spanish fluently). Most of the meetings (case presentations, colleges, grand rounds) were in Catalan. At these meetings my colleague residents were deliberating with multiple doctors from other departments so using English for these comprehensive meetings was not an option.

To conclude, I would definitely recommend the Infectious Diseases-team of ICO for an internship of an European resident in Internal Medicine, especially for a resident with special interest in infections in immunocompromised patients. This department is also appropriate for an extended visit of, for instance, three to four months.

As the Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge has organized internships for foreign residents before, my internship was organized perfectly upon arrival. Naturally I can only assess this particular hospital and do not have an opinion about other Spanish hospitals. However, to take full advantage of the internship, it is fundamental to have an advanced level of Spanish.