Pre-Clinical Rotations in Spain: A Comparison to the US Health System

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Introduction

During the summer of 2013 I spent a total of four weeks doing pre-clinical rotations in the University Hospital of Son Espases in Palma de Mallorca, Spain. The overall goal of the trip was twofold: First, I wanted to have more exposure in a hospital setting that included patient interaction as well as the overall feel for what it was like to work in a hospital as a healthcare provider. This was completely achieved by the end of my four weeks after having rotated with physicians on rounds throughout the entire experience. The second goal of the trip was to have a basis for comparison between a healthcare system such as Spain’s and the one we currently have in the United States. This goal was also achieved via my experiences in the hospital, the conversations I had with healthcare providers and my own independent research.

Hospital Universitario de Son Espases

Located on the Balearic island of Mallorca, Spain, this is the main public hospital of reference for the citizens of Palma de Mallorca and the surrounding communities. (Estimated population of 330,000.) It is also the hospital of reference for all of the highly specialized operations required throughout the Balearic Islands.

- Occupies a space of 172,000 square meters and contains: 1,920 beds
- 26 Operating rooms
- 107 Intensive care boxes

-Serves as a teaching hospital where Medical Residents from all over Spain can come to train in their respective specialties.

Infectious Disease Rotation

My experience rotating through the Infectious Disease department was an excellent opportunity for me to hone my skills in anaculture and history taking. Rounding with the Attending physicians and the residents I grew familiar with identifying abnormal breathing sounds including wheezing, crackles and ronchi. On several occasions I was asked to perform full histories and examinations on the patients which I later was asked to present. It was also an excellent refresher of microbiology and the variety of different pharmaceuticals used in this particular field.

On this rotation I was also able to spend a significant amount of time with HIV positive patients who came in for consultations and status checks. It was here that I saw the wonders of anti-retrovirals in action as well being taught when physicians in Spain make much less money then their American counterparts. A system of universal healthcare seems to result in longer waiting times to see specialists or to be discharged from the hospital because of the limited resources at hand. However most would agree that waiting is much more acceptable then not having coverage at all. In the end I believe that a universal health care system like Spain’s has its pros and cons, but the quality of care provided by physicians in Spain was on par with anything that I have witnessed here in the US and my experience on a whole was a fantastic one.

OBGYN Rotation

This rotation was a very comprehensive look at the entire OBGYN department. I shadowed attendings and residents in general obstetrical consults, gynecologic consults, the operating room, emergency OB visits and the gestational floor. Through this rotation I was able to see the ultrasound machine used in a variety of ways and learned skills on how to examine the female patient. From soon to deliver mothers to high risk pregnancies, this rotation exposed me to a little bit of everything this specialty has to offer.

Interesting cases:
- Endometriosis
- Human Papilloma virus
- Open Total hysterectomy after finding malignant carcinoma on cyst. Removal of omentum and appendix as well
- Cystocele. Removed via vaginal hysterectomy
- Omphalocoele discovered in twins of 12 week gestational age
- HIV infected pregnant mother
- Oligohydranmios

General thoughts on Spanish healthcare

Compared to my experiences in the United States, I felt like there was an overall laidback atmosphere amongst the physicians that was fantastic. The residents were allowed to wear jeans on rounds much to my envy and it seemed to me like there existed more warmth in the patient-physician interaction compared to what I have witnessed in the US. On the other hand, due the current financial crisis in Spain major cuts were being made in the hospital which required the physicians to take more call even if they didn’t want to. Also a system of universal healthcare seems to result in longer waiting times to see specialists or to be discharged from the hospital because of the limited resources at hand. However most would agree that waiting is much more acceptable than not having coverage at all. In the end I believe that a universal health care system like Spain’s has its pros and cons, but the quality of care provided by physicians in Spain was on par with anything that I have witnessed here in the US and my experience on a whole was a fantastic one.

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