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Med Uni Graz- Multidisciplinary Pediatric Program Reflection

Over the past month, I have been at the Medical University of Graz participating in the Multidisciplinary Pediatric Program. This consisted of daily ward rounds in the morning, followed by lectures in the afternoon. While lectures were taught in English, much of what was discussed on the wards was in Austrian German. Although I may have understood less of what was being said, I felt the rounds were both more engaging and informative.

Each week, students taking part in the program were assigned to different specialties. During the four weeks, I was placed on Psychosomatic Medicine, Radiology, Infectiology, and General Pediatrics. I enjoyed the variety of topics I was able to cover, both familiar and new. I had not been introduced to psychosomatic medicine, and I am not sure if the United States even has it as a specialty. Here, although the day-to-day rounds were uneventful—due to the patients being long-term patients—I still felt that it was informative. The doctors on this ward were the most helpful out of any rotation I was on. They explained everything to me in English, and taught me some aspects of the physical exam, even allowing me to practice on them.

My second week was with Radiology. To me, the most striking difference between radiology in Austria and in the United States was that the radiologists took the images themselves. In the United States, I have only seen techs do this, with the radiologists merely interpreting the images. I felt the Austrian process to be more intuitive and effective. It makes sense to me for the doctor interpreting the images to be the one to look around and take the pictures themselves. Otherwise, there is a potential for confusion.

On radiology, I gained a greater appreciation for ultrasound. You can see so much from this non-invasive procedure: from quickly checking up on a chronic illness, to finding locations of new ailments, and so much more. The first three days I was on radiology, I followed a resident who both explained how the ultrasound worked and explained various patient cases. These varied from kidney disorders to cancers. The more patients we saw, the more I was convinced of the wonderful power of ultrasound.

My third week was on infectiology—synonymous to Infectious Disease in the United States. Here, although much was in German, I had the benefit of bacteria and virus names being familiar, as they have Latin names regardless of what country you are in. I also had been in Austria for over two weeks, so I was able to understand much more than when I first arrived. I liked this rotation as I was able to review various infectious diseases that I learned during my M1 year.

My fourth and final week was on General Pediatrics. The cases on this floor varied tremendously, from nephrotic kidney disorders to seizures to ITP. These rounds were most like what I would expect of from the United States, and there was even a medical student from the University on her rotation during the time I was there. She explained many of the cases to me, along with another doctor.

Although I did spend much of my time at the hospital, I made sure to explore the surrounding area as well. My first weekend, before the program began, I decided to go to the Formula 1 Grand Prix in Spielberg, Austria, which just happened to be an hour from Graz. This was an unbelievable experience, especially because I am a fan of the sport. As a group, the students in the program took a walking tour of Graz our first week in town. The next weekend I ventured to Vienna, where I walked around learning about the history of the city. The third weekend, I met up with a teammate from Rutgers Women’s Rowing, who is from Austria. She came to visit Graz, and to take me to an Austrian chocolate factory for a tour and tasting. We also hiked one of the mountains close to Graz and took a ride on the alpine coaster. During my final weekend in Graz, I visited her hometown, as well as the Mauthausen concentration camp. The camp was very emotional, but I feel that it is important to honor the history, and remember the lives lost, of places like this.

When the program was completed, I flew to Amsterdam to visit another teammate, and we spent a few days in her cottage.

I feel that the program in Graz was overwhelmingly beneficial to both my development as a physician and as a person. I learned new skills at the hospital and learned a lot about the care of pediatric patients: both on the floor and in lectures. I also was able to experience living in Europe on my own. This allowed me to improve communication skills, allowed me to explore, and gave me experiences I will take with me for the rest of my life.