

While in Zaragoza I was able to immerse myself into the Spanish language and culture while gaining valuable experience in the Spanish healthcare system. The physicians and residents I was able to work with were easy going and more than happy to accommodate my specific interests when it came to shadowing different specialties. I also had the opportunity to attend a weeklong global health conference regarding primary care that took place in Zaragoza while I was there.

I began my rotations in primary care at Centro de Salud Actur Sur since this is somewhat of the central hub within Spanish healthcare. Patients must see their primary care physicians before they can be directed off to a specialist. Because of this, I saw many different illnesses that spanned across different age groups. These included diabetes, hypertension, schizophrenia, eating disorders, rotator cuff injuries and many more. I enjoyed working one-on-one with the physician and his patients because I was able to take part in most of the physical examinations.

While working in the primary care setting, I learned how the Spanish healthcare system functions. The primary care physicians are centralized in one health center, unlike American doctors who each have their own offices. Patients register upon arriving to the health center and wait outside their doctor's individual office. Employed patients pay 40% of the price of their prescriptions, while those who are unemployed receive them for free. All visits to the health center are free. This was an interesting aspect of the healthcare system, as I saw the same patients at the beginning and at the end of my trip in the primary care setting. Since the office visit and the majority of the prescription are free, it is very easy for patients to return to the office multiple times within a short period even if it is unnecessary. Another aspect of Spanish primary care that was both interesting and fun was the home visits. The physician makes house calls one day a week to patients who live in the area. These patients may be elderly, have terminal illnesses, or difficulty walking.

The majority of my time was spent with Ob/Gyn at Hospital Miguel Servet since I have a strong interest in this specialty. Because there is a distinct maternity hospital and ER, I was able to see many different cases. Often the patients entering the maternity ER were admitted to the hospital to begin the labor process. They were first transported to the dilatation rooms before switching to the "paritorio" (birthing rooms). I also saw many different kinds of surgeries including c-sections, prolapsed amniotic sac, bartholin cysts, and more. What made this setting so conducive to learning was that the residents rotate between each of these areas (the ER, OR, birthing rooms), and if one area was less busy or an interesting surgery was about to take place we were able to switch around.

As far as the city itself, Zaragoza was extremely safe and fun. The atmosphere is bright and young with lots of festivals and sights to see. I lived in an apartment right by the city center. I really enjoyed adapting to the Spanish eating schedule (and the delicious food). The bus system is also very convenient and easy. During our stay there, the physician we shadowed took us on day trips to a castle, and to one of the oldest churches in the country. In addition to perfecting my Spanish speaking skills, the culture and medical experiences allow me to recommend Zaragoza to anyone who would like to be in a fun city while gaining hands-on experience.



