

Andrew Lipsky

Summer 2009 In Zaragoza, Spain

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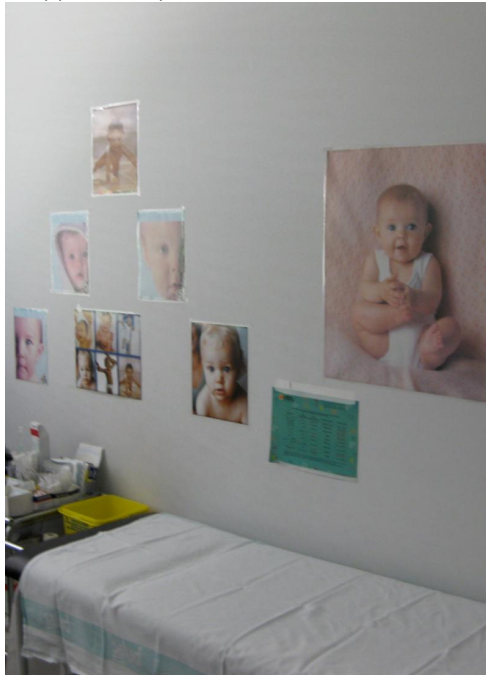
Coordinator: Dr. Javier Garcia-Campayo

Hospital Miguel Servet & University of Zaragoza

Overview

The Summer Program in Zaragoza consisted of one month of clinical rotations in city health centers and main hospitals customized to the preferences of RWJMS students. It offered students exposure to the health care system of the fifth largest city in Spain with observation in the field of primary care, pediatrics, emergency medicine and critical care.

A Typical Day



On a typical day in the Zaragoza program, I spent the morning with a different physician in the outpatient setting. From 8:30am to 1:00 pm a physician and student might see twenty or so patients each with a unique story to tell. The physicians were wonderful and would discuss the particulars of each case with student in Spanish to ensure that they had an idea of the particulars regarding the history and physical and assessment and plan. As students we were offered the opportunity to discuss the case in Spanish while practicing basic clinical skills including auscultation and taking vitals. After a break for lunch, the afternoon hours typically would consist of continuing medical education lectures put together by local physicians, or a regional conference on improving health care outcomes. Inpatient opportunities were also provided.

The Amazing People and Physicians of Zaragoza

By far, the most wonderful aspect of our experience was the chance to work with such wonderful and caring physicians. As mentors they each did a superb job to ensure that we as students were able to get a feel for the culture of Zaragoza, the people, the heritage, the food, and the practice of medicine in Spain. They introduced us to a way of living and set of values that it in many ways different from that in America, but in other ways very much the same. They made us feel like part of their family and treated with the utmost respect. They were open to our ideas and to conversing about the world in such a way that we all returned knowing that we had made real friends across the ocean. Robert's physician, Dr. Veldeperez, was particularly hospitable, inviting us for dinner, a weekend of hiking the Spanish Pyrenees, and organizing bike rides around the city. Dr. Campayo also did a great job meeting with us each Monday afternoon monitor our progress and address any concerns. At these meetings, we learned about the Spanish healthcare system in comparison to the system in the US.



The city is small so its easy to see in a week or two. Weekends are totally free so you can take trips .What I would suggest doing, is staying in europe after your rotations and doing some backpacking. I did pretty much all of spain and some of morroco and portugal for 30 days after. Beau did some more eastern europe stuff.

Also, over the summer there are also some cool festivals. There is the corrida in toledo which everyone knows about. I also went to the battle of the wine in Haro, where you climb up a mountain in wine country and shoot at people with supersoakers full of cheap vino. Its was also super awesome.



Spanish Language Proficiency

A strength of the program was that in pairing students with physicians Dr. Garcia Campayo considered not only their clinical preference, but also their level of Spanish language proficiency. For beginner level speakers, patient encounters were translated at the conclusion of the patient interview. Speakers with more advanced proficiency participated in the patient interview process. Regardless of proficiency level at the beginning of the program, the “full emersion” style of our clinical experience did wonders for our ability to communicate effectively in Spanish in the health care setting. The physicians were very eager to help us in this regard. In future years, medical Spanish tutoring will be included with the program.

There are four important observations that I should add about Spain... they pretty much sum up why it is an amazing place.

1. If you go to the main city park at 11:30 pm on a weeknight, not only will it be filled with people, but you'll also see a 70 year old couple holding hands while out for a stroll.
2. When people walk their dogs, they don't put them on a leash, ever. They just whistle and the dog comes running.
3. On Sundays people go out to brunch/dinner with their entire family. It lasts like 6 hours and wine is unlimited.
4. I once saw kids acting very immature while riding in the front of the bus, they were rowdy and loud, and reminded me of typical American kids. Then, an elderly woman came on, and they all simultaneously got up and offered her their seats.