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Gothenburg Exchange

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Background on Gothenburg

Gothenburg, being Sweden's second largest city, and bearing many similarities to Cork, has earned itself the nickname of "The People's Republic Of Sweden". As part of clinical our clinical rotations in 4th year, myself and ten other students were lucky enough to be chosen to participate in an exchange programme with the University of Gothenburg, and have the opportunity to live and study there for a month. Sweden's healthcare system is renowned worldwide, and it was a wonderful opportunity to work alongside medical professionals operating in a different system and cultural setting to the one we see here at home. There are a number of differences between Ireland's healthcare system and that seen in Sweden. A key difference is the emphasis placed on private healthcare: While private care is an element of Sweden's healthcare system, services are predominantly funded by the taxpayer, and while the quality of healthcare in Sweden is universally well-regarded, waiting times for GP visits, specialist appointments and operations are seen to be one of the key issues facing the medical system there.

First Impressions

On our arrival in Gothenburg, we were warmly welcomed by the medical teams and professionals, allowing us to integrate seamlessly into the new environment. The majority of the staff and students were able to speak English fluently, so lectures and tutorials were extremely well run and provided us with an excellent setting in which to learn.

The medical teams are structured quite differently in comparison to those in Ireland. There seemed to be no hierarchy as such, everybody wore the same scrubs, and even the consultants asked us to address them by their first name. This allowed us to integrate and interact with the team with ease, and really allowed us to feel included and valued.

The 11 Cork-based students were divided into the specialties which we had requested when applying for the programme. I, along with one other student was attached to the obstetrics and gynaecology team for a month, while three students were attached to each of the medicine, paediatrics and and surgical teams. The OBGYN experience we had was second to none. The team allowed us to get very involved clinically, and as a result we performed speculum exams, observed vaginal deliveries, and also scrubbed in on a number of C-Sections. When dealing with patients the language barrier was a bit more problematic, however the team were always more than willing to translate histories for us.



Fertility Medicine in Sweden

In Sweden, fertility medicine is offered to couples struggling to conceive naturally through the public system and we spent one week in the fertility department where we observed IVF egg extractions and implantations and we also sat in on couples' consultations. According to national figures, approximately 12,000 IVF treatments are given annually in Sweden, double that of Ireland. Literature on the topic points to ever increasing government funding for IVF and fertility treatment in Sweden, thereby allowing fertility care to become more affordable and accessible as a result [1]. Here in Ireland, Assisted Human Reproduction treatment is not currently funded by the Irish Public Health Service, couples oftentimes have to pay upwards of €4500 for one course of IVF treatment [2]. Cost means that IVF in Ireland is quite an exclusive option, with many couples finding the financial burden prohibitive. Having the chance to see the benefits and rewards of such a system was truly eye-opening and is something I'll treasure for the rest of my career. We also spent a few days in an abortion clinic, which again was incredibly educational, and a new learning experience for us as medical students.

Fika

During our down time, if you could even call it that, we made the most of every minute. Most days after placement we would head into Gothenburg city and meet up for fika, the most important part of any Swede's day. Fika is a Swedish tradition where one meets up with friends, usually mid-afternoon, for a sweet treat and a catch up. The public transport system connecting the city to the surrounding suburbs is excellent, and furthermore we all stayed together in an accommodation building approximately 15 minutes from the city centre by tram, which arrived every 3-5 minutes, certainly different to what we're used to in Ireland! We tried to be as adventurous as we could with the local cuisine which for the most part was delicious, particularly the local seafood and fresh baked goods. I'm a pescatarian so the Nordic cuisine suited me down to the ground. Our student buddies who we were partnered up with by the academy were wonderful. They brought us ice skating, rock climbing and showed us all the best pubs and restaurants. The group were so enthusiastic and accommodating. It really added to our whole trip. We're still in contact with many of them, some hoping to visit us in Ireland in the post-covid era. A group of us took a boat trip and explored the Archipelago coastline on our final weekend and went trekking to various look out points, a highlight for many of us. At the weekends we travelled to both Oslo and Stockholm by train and explored these two beautiful cities, we were so lucky that both capital cities were in such close proximity to Gothenburg.

Recommendation to other Students

Partaking in this exchange programme has undoubtedly been my most cherished memory from university so far, I would highly recommend everyone to apply for if given the opportunity. The experience I had both medically and culturally will most definitely stand to me for the rest of my career.

References

1. "Fertility Treatment." HSE.ie, www2.hse.ie/conditions/child-health/fertility-problems-and-treatments/fertility-treatment.html.
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