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PLACEMENT: TARTU UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, ESTONIA

WARD: OPERATIVE AND ANESTHESIA DEPARTMENT

DURATION: 4 WEEKS (WEEK 48-51), 27.11.17- 22.12.17

1.PRACTICE PLACEMENT

I did my practice in Tartu University Hospital which is locally known as Tartu Uelikooli kliinikum (TUK) in their operative and anaesthesia department. My practice was for a duration of four weeks. First week I was with the scrubbing department and the last three weeks I was with the anaesthesia department. The hospital prides itself of having 14 operative rooms and in addition the preparation and recovery room. The staff however feel that they need more rooms because the number of scheduled operations outweighs the rooms available at the moment. This 14 operative rooms take care of all the operations apart from those that involve the eyes, throat, nose, mouth or ears which are scheduled in other areas of the same hospitals or in other areas of the city.

Tartu is the second largest city in Estonia and therefore the hospital catered for half the population while the one in their capital city Tallinn catered for the other half of the population. This essentially gives students the opportunity to learn a lot because you are guaranteed of seeing majority of operations imaginable. The hospital is also a learning institution for young resident surgeons.

2.ARRIVAL

I arrived in Tartu by bus from Tallinn which took me roughly 2.5 hours and I was lucky enough because one of the international coordinators Mr. Danel was waiting for me at the bus station. We however had this arranged earlier when I was sure of my travelling dates and time. My apartment was at Nooruse 5 which was a few kilometres from the city (30 min walk) and was around 10 minutes to the hospital. The weather felt slightly warmer than Finland at the time of my arrival. Since my practice was a last-minute thing, I had to start the following day and Mr. Danel was kind enough to escort me to the hospital, he showed me around before taking me to my actual department.

3.PRACTICE EXPERIENCE

My first week I was with the scrub nursing department. My mentor spoke quite good English and was really helpful and frequently enquired if I had questions or if I needed to do something. I however did not do so much during this week because there was a lot of surgical residents at the time leaving no room for nursing students and therefore I did more of observing and helped out quite abit. The following weeks I was with the anaesthesia department and I had a total of four mentors. I would say that this three weeks I did quite a lot and actually really enjoyed it.

There are certain positive things that really amused me. First, I could tell that hospital environment was quite friendly and most of the people were really warm and approachable. Secondly my mentors were really eager for me to learn and therefore would ask on my behalf from the anaesthesia doctor if they could work with me and instruct me on what was required. The head nurse also played a big role in rotating me in deferent rooms each day so that I could see as many different operations as possible and actually three of my shifts were scheduled in the throat, nose and mouth department to another area of the hospital and city so that I could see

and do as much as possible. Third, during long surgical procedures when there was really not much to do, my mentors would escort me to other operative procedures that they thought were unique or those that I had not seen which was beyond my imagination. Fourth, even the surgeons were really helpful and even though they had their own surgical students they would occasionally request that their students move aside so they could show me a thing or two about the operation.

One of the impressive things was that when they used the Estonian language I could slightly understand some words because they sounded a bit similar to the Finnish language. The other thing is that I am already used to the fact that in every new place I go to the people there are curious about where I am from and why I am in Europe but I was not prepared to be labelled as “the Finnish girl”. This landed me into some interesting incidences where some of the surgeons and nurses who spoke Finnish would speak to me in the Finnish language and I would use the little basic Finnish I knew to reply or keep the conversation going.

There was a difference on how they went about their procedures and they sometimes did things different to how we were taught in school. I remember sometimes thinking that if I did some of the things that they were doing my teachers would not be so happy. A good example was that some surgeons did not wash their hands at the beginning of every new surgery. They washed their hands at the beginning of the day and disinfected the rest of the time. I did ask about this and my mentor said that some surgeons don't believe in washing their hands each time because they believe this will damage their skin and she said that she was aware that Finland had stricter aseptic rules than Estonia.

Overall, I think this was a great place to learn and I would not have had this amazing experience had I done it in Finland. I definitely would recommend that other students go to Tartu for their practice.

4. TO DO LIST BEFORE THE ARRIVAL

Take an MRSA test. The hospital requires that you have this test done before starting the practice. You can take this test in private hospitals like Terveystalo if you are in Finland which costs around 65euros and the test takes around 5 working days. If you however happened to come to Estonia like a week before the practice you can have the international coordinator direct you to a hospital in Tartu and this will cost you around 40euros.

Request for an apartment beforehand. The apartments I got were shared apartments at Nooruse 5 with around 3 people per room and three rooms per house that means you have around 8-9 students sharing the kitchen, bathroom and toilet. The rent was around 250 euros a month and it was just but 10 minutes to the hospital. This hostel changes the sheets, and towels every week and provide you with beddings, bed, small wardrobe (no lock) and table. They also provide toiletries but you need to buy your own soap. They have dishes ready for you, a cooker, fridge and a boiling kettle but no microwave so you have to warm your food the old fashion way. Electricity and water expenses as well as Wi-Fi are included in the rent money as well.

Talk to any of the international coordinators about your arrival, how and when so that they can arrange for a pick up when you get to Tartu instead of you being stranded.

Download the taxify app. This is a very cheap taxi app. You can actually use it the minute you arrive in Estonia and you can order a taxi from any location. I Had an unfortunate situation where I paid from the ship dock to the bus station a price of 25euros only to pay 4.50euros using taxify when going back to the ship dock from the bus station. I realised that taxi drivers take advantage of foreigners who don't know the prices they are really supposed to pay. This app calculated the rate you might pay even before you order for the taxi.

5. LIVING EXPERIENCE IN TARTU

You may think that life will be cheaper in Estonia but it really is not. While some things may be cheaper, I think many things were as expensive as in Finland. I would recommend that you make a budget the same way you would if you were in Finland. Carry a little more money because you are sure going to eat out before you settle down. It is better safe than sorry.

The weather is almost similar to Finland so if its winter in Finland be sure to expect the same kind of weather in Estonia.

If you do not like sharing then Nooruse is not the place for you. You may have different roommates from different countries almost every week. However, if you want to make new friends then this is definite the place to be plus its affordable and convenient.

You are likely to find most of the familiar things like shops and restaurants that are found in most part of Europe. There is actually other exotic cuisines and restaurants if you are a big fun of this and the prices are average not so cheap nor too expensive.

Tartu is a beautiful city with big beautiful malls and they pride themselves with the new Launa Keskus which happens to even have an ice skating ground inside the mall. They also have around four other malls within the city. The city is divided into two. The modern buildings and the old ones. This creates a great scenery to walk, take good food and drinks and also take pictures.

There is a good bus connection in and out of the city and the prices are affordable. However, you can always use the taxi.

In case you live near the hospital and you need to do a little shopping then there is a small supermarket just 5 mins form the hospital and it has most of the things you may need, otherwise you have to go to the city. If you are from Finland and you want to shop somewhere familiar then you can take a taxi to Prisma which is exactly the same as the other in Finland.

Language should not worry you as quite a good number of people speak English and in most shops, and restaurants or service points they do have someone who speaks some level of English.

The water does taste really different for what I am used to and I must admit that I didn't get used to it even though I was there for a whole month. The water is safe from the tap to drink but the taste was really not pleasant. So I would advise other students to either buy drinking water or buy some juices etc because it's possible to be dehydrated as the water intake will be low due to the taste.

6.FEEDBACK

Nordman network is really helpful and I would encourage every student to apply for this as the money goes a long way to help you have an easier time during your practice placement and you do not have to worry too much about the financial issues. I think this was really a great gesture because I would otherwise have had to use my savings. Am also sure many foreign students who are from other countries other than Europe stay away from exchange as they view this as an added expense.

After the practice, I actually got a certificate from Tartu Tervishoiu Kõrgkool which is their health care college that partners with JAMK in exchange programmes. The certificate was a way to have proof that I did have my exchange practice in Estonia. This actually made me feel quite great about the whole experience.

Even though I cannot complain about the hostels I just wish the wardrobes had some kind of lock because so many people were coming in and out of the room that if something got lost you would not even know how to keep track. It would also keep some of the students at ease. Other than that, I think the hostels were quite clean and it was comfortable living there.

My practice went really well and I have no complaints whatsoever about them and I just hope more students can actually go for exchange to TUK.

The city was beautiful as well as the people. I felt respected and I fit in so well. I had no negative experience whatsoever as everything was even better than what I expected. I am just but grateful about everything.