

Hippokrates Exchange to Medina Del Campo, Castilla y Leon Region, Spain

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Having been browsing the RCGP website back in November 2009, I stumbled upon an exchange programme available for GP trainees and those newly qualified. For me, seeing the opportunity to combine work and travel was a real find!

I was keen to improve my Spanish and expressed this early on in my correspondence. Therefore, I was quickly put in touch with a Spanish trainee, Aitor who was in his final year and who had been involved with Vasco de Gama already.

I was lucky to be able to stay in Aitor's flat in Valladolid and travel with him daily to the clinic, which was approximately 25 miles south west in a town called Medina Del Campo.

The population of Medina Del Campo is around 20,000. It is an affluent area in a rural setting. Among the shops and train station, it also has a number of historic features, including a 12th century castle.



Aitor and his GP trainer outside Medina del Campo Centro de Salud Urbano

During an average day, I sat in with one of the experienced doctors in the practice, who knew her population well and who had worked at the practice for over 20 years. She was also the principal GP trainer for the medical centre. The day would start at 9am, and the first 30 minutes was spent meeting drug representatives in the foyer, typically there were 4 or 5 to greet. The consultations would start at 9:30am and each would last 6 minutes. There would be a short break at 11am for a coffee in a local bar (10 minutes) and then return to work until around 2:30pm.

The breadth of medicine encountered appeared more limited than in the UK; the majority of consultations observed were for 'baja laboral' – the sick note, to collect results and for coughs and colds. Home visits were conducted in a similar way, where by the GP is instructed on a daily basis if any visit is needed for a patient of theirs. Out of hours work was undertaken by many of the GP that I encountered and this constitutes one 24 hour shift every 1-2 weeks. Each medical practice is run by the government and is set up to serve all the residents of the town, or of the rural areas. I was observing in the medical practice that served the town.

In terms of GP training, the course is 4 years long, with a mix of hospital and GP posts, there appears to be more variety and trainee choice regarding hospital posts and specialties. The final year is spent in General Practice very similar to the UK. When in General Practice, the trainees are allocated one trainer and they share consultations throughout. The trainee takes consultations under direct supervision, and this is the same for on call duties which are taken alongside a qualified GP. There is a lesser emphasis on communication skills during training and I was lucky enough to sit in on the weekly study sessions for trainees, where the emphasis was largely focused towards preventative medicine. Many of the trainees I met were planning to take up a career in emergency medicine as in Spain they must complete General Practice training first. All graduates from University, if wishing to take up a career, must sit an exam 1 year from graduation in order to proceed. Competition for jobs was fierce in Valladolid, and many trainees were applying large distances from where they lived. Thankfully Aitor managed to secure a job in his home town of Burgos, just after I returned to the UK, but he spent a number of weeks applying and waiting to see if any jobs came up, if at all!



At the celebratory evening meal at a traditional Castillian restaurant in honour of the new GP graduates

A great resource that was produced daily and delivered to all medical professionals was a paper called *Diario Medico* (www.diariomedico.com). It was easy to read, widely accessible, free, and kept you up to date with health news on a daily basis. An equivalent in the UK would be great.

My time spent in Spain was very valuable and has opened my eyes to different ways to practicing medicine and the similarities. It was a great cultural insight in addition, and something I'd love to do again in the future.