

My experience in Henfield as part of the hippokrates programme

The second time I enrolled in a hippokrates exchange programme, I went to an internship at the Henfield Medical Center (HMC), in a rural area of England. I chose England because I wanted to have an experience in a highly developed health system, where General Practitioners (GPs) have an important and widely known role in primary care.

Henfield has a residential area surrounded by trees with many cottages and gardens full of squirrels. I found that the population is quite aged, basically with the same health problems we find in Portugal in elderly people, but with better quality of life.



Patient's home visits allowed me to realize that the population has a good standard of living and enjoy living in the countryside, away from the hustle of the city. They were happy with the care they received and with the proximity to the health care service.

My internship program was structured in a way so that I could contact with all HMC's areas and health professionals. I also had the opportunity to visit Horsham hospital, a branch surgery in Partridge Green, a nursing home in Red Oaks and a dermatology clinic at Steyning Medical Center.

I could observe that in England nurses are responsible for most of preventive interventions and are much more self-sufficient and specialized than in Portugal. They have an important role in the management of chronic disease (eg. diabetes, asthma /COPD, heart disease), which in Portugal is done by doctors. This work-sharing allows a better return on resources, giving more time to General Practitioners to take care of critical patients. In England there are nurses specialized in child care (called health visitors), in maternal care (midwives) and palliative care (community nurses). They can also perform counseling in contraception, cervical cytology collecting and the screening of acute problems prior to medical appointments.

Another significant difference is that in England screening programs for breast and colorectal cancers are provided to the community without the involvement of GPs who only have to focus on patients with abnormal results.

As in Portugal, GPs take the role of "gatekeepers" of the health system, controlling the access to secondary care. Some of them have special interests in certain medical areas (dermatology, minor surgery, gynecology, cardiology) to whom patients can be referred before being sent to the hospital.

Medical appointments can be performed in person or by phone. In the doctor-patient relationship, doctors are highly skilled in communication. I noticed a great concern in giving the patient an adequate explanation about the health condition. Patients are well informed about their health also because there are organized patient groups supported by the national health system (NHS), promoting meetings on community health education.

I was also impressed by the low number of laboratory tests routinely ordered to patients as well as imaging studies. GPs are careful to ask for what is strictly necessary. The results of the requested tests are directly sent to the medical center and inputted in the computer database. Thus, GPs do not have to worry about whether patients have the tests done or where the results are. I think this is an advantage of this system when compared to the Portuguese one, where the patient carries the exams with him and GPs have to input the data.

I had the opportunity to attend two interesting medical meetings held to discuss prescriptions and referrals of the medical center, with the participation of the Practice Manager, GPs and a clinical commissioning group from the NHS. The main objective was to understand the key needs of the population, to give them the best response based on the local available resources.

I was also able to participate in programs of flu immunization, spreading information through posters and leaflets with advice for the risk groups.



Having tea two times a day is an excellent habit that I have to introduce in my daily work routine. I really think that this is important for breaking the stress and do a more effective job.

The two weeks I spent in Henfield passed in a blink of an eye. I was very welcomed by everyone and I easily could establish a good relationship with all the professionals I've been working with. It was an excellent experience, which allowed me to open new horizons. I'll certainly recommend it to other GP's trainees.

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