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MY ISRAEL EXPERIENCE

I spent March and April of 2001 doing two months of fourth-year electives at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. I received a 5,000\$ scholarship from the Mt. Sinai Healthcare Foundation and was therefore able to afford the plane fare and living costs. Overall I had a fantastic experience. I enjoyed experiencing medicine in a different country, did lots of sightseeing, and wasn't overly burdened with work.

GETTING ACCEPTED

Honestly, I didn't do anything to get accepted to the program. Because of all the violence in Israel and the fact that this was year one of the program, I just told Dean Smith I wanted to go. We met and reviewed my credentials. Voila, I was accepted.

CHOOSING YOUR ELECTIVES

If you are a fluent Hebrew speaker, you can do any elective in the hospital. You will have no problems and can ignore most of the rest of what I have to say. However, if you're like me and don't know much more than Shalom, your choices are limited. I wanted to do Emergency Medicine and Psychiatry but both choices were rejected by the hospital administration. They also told me I couldn't do Family medicine, Medicine or Pediatrics. I chose Dermatology and Radiology, figuring that at least I would have some nice pictures to look at even if I didn't understand a word of what was happening around me. These were definitely good choices as language did end up being an issue for me.

CHOOSING ELECTIVE MONTHS

The Israeli medicine system is on a different calendar than ours. They take a winter vacation in February and have time off for all of the Jewish holidays. Check a Hebrew calendar prior to setting up your elective months because you cannot get bedding, meal tickets, etc when the medical school is on holiday.

ROOM AND BOARD

Hadassah hospital provides housing and two meals a day Sunday through Friday free of charge. In addition, they provide bedding, towels and a white coat through the hospital laundry. I was living and working at Hadassah Ein Kerem which is in the Southwest corner of Jerusalem. I lived in the Boston dorms with Israeli nursing and dental students. We had an "apartment" with three bedrooms and two girls per room. At first, we had difficulty communicating. Although my roommates read and wrote English quite well, their spoken English was poor. However, over my 10 weeks in Israel, my roommates adjusted to speaking English with me and they taught me a little Hebrew as well. I really enjoyed living with Israelis. I got a better sense of Israeli culture and my roommates were friendly and very helpful.

LANGUAGE

Most people in Jerusalem understand simple English and can respond, although typically with fairly poor English. I didn't have too many problems getting around on the buses or going to the market. However, the language of spoken communication in the hospital is Hebrew. As such, I had difficulty clinically. The physicians were very nice about translating the "essence" of the conversation into English, but I felt a bit lost most of the time. I would have learned a lot more medicine if I knew Hebrew. For me, the language barrier was frustrating. Although I worked diligently to improve my Hebrew, I didn't get very far.

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Month 1-Dermatology

This was a light rotation. My days consisted of 1-2 hours of lectures on common dermatological problems, and then 2-3 hours of clinic. Most of the physicians would translate the lectures into English. If they were unable to translate, the Israeli medical students were always willing to help. As for clinic, I went into the room with an attending and watched him/her interview the patient. I did not see patients independently nor did the Israeli medical students. In addition, 1-2 mornings a week, I went to rounds. Dermatology has an inpatient service so I would listen to rounds in Hebrew and look at a variety of severe dermatological lesions. Of note, the Israeli medical students on this elective were seventh year. In Israel, college and medical school are combined into seven years of training plus a stag which is like our internship.

Just a scheduling note, the Israeli week runs from Sunday to Thursday. I had every Friday and Saturday off.

Month 2-Radiology

Initially I had intended to do a general radiology month with emphasis on chest x-rays and abdominal CT's. But no one in either of those departments spoke English. I was given the choice of neuroradiology or ultrasound because the physicians in these areas are native English speakers. I chose neuroradiology and had a great month. I worked from 9AM-3PM mostly sitting at the MRI board reading films with the radiologists. In addition, there were weekly conferences, which the doctors would do in English if I asked, and Monday was angiography day. I saw all sorts of myelograms, discograms, carotid angiographies and other invasive radiologic procedures.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Jill Adika was my contact person at Hebrew University, both while I was in the states and once I arrived in Israel. She is an ex-New Yorker and very friendly. I e-mailed her numerous times before I arrived to make arrangements and used her as a support system while in Israel.

On the CWRU end, Angela Rhinehardt and Dean Smith were whom I spoke with to coordinate my trip. They were also exceptionally helpful and supportive

SIGHTSEEING WHILE ON ELECTIVES

During both months, I was encouraged by Jill Adika to travel as opportunities arose. So I typically left Jerusalem for 1-2 days a week and took buses to all different parts of the country. No one on either of the clinical rotations was upset as long as I informed them in advance that I wouldn't be there. I also left early occasionally to tour around Jerusalem. In addition, I took off the entire week of Passover (which the Israeli medical students had off as well) and traveled.

THE POLITICAL CLIMATE

I went to Israel during the heart of the Intifada at a time when there were (and continue to be) travel warnings issued by the US state department. Overall, I felt very safe when I was there and was only mildly limited in the places I could see (mostly because tour companies were not running tours due to a lack of tourists, not due to unsafe conditions). I took buses and cabs at all times of day and night and was comfortable "crossing the green line" into the "West Bank". There were very few places I would not visit due to safety concerns, these included Gaza, Jericho, Ramallah, and Hebron. However, during my fifth week, a number of fatal, bus bombings occurred throughout the country, one in Jerusalem. This scared me immensely and for about a week I seriously debated returning to the US. Ultimately, I decided to stay and refused to let terrorists ruin my Israel experience. After that, I made that decision, I was no longer preoccupied with safety concerns and was free to travel the country.

If I can be of further assistance, feel free to e-mail me at naallasirota@hotmail.com