



IRAN

This is a report about my professional exchange in the Emergency Department of the Imam Khomeini Hospital, Tehran, Iran, and about the time I spend in this at times strange but always fascinating country.

The first day

My first day in Tehran was already a very overwhelming experience. I arrived, with almost an hour delay and after more than 12 hours of travelling, at 5.30 a.m. Beforehand I had very extensive contact with my LEO and was expecting him to pick me up. Unfortunately, when I stepped out of the arrival gate, I could not see him anywhere. After half an hour and when I was about to get panicky I luckily saw him and we drove through the just awaking Tehran to my dorm, a house just for female medical students. But I could not sleep immediately. First I was shown around, I got explanations about the differences between Toman and Rial, a lesson in Persian numbers and my SIM-card. After that, we made a short trip to the hospital and I was introduced to some of the Professors and we checked if everything was ready. Of course, almost nothing was prepared for my internship and we had to go to various offices to make sure that I could start my internship as planned. After that I could finally lie down and have a short rest. When I woke up, I met Lidia, another exchange student from Spain who invited me to lunch with her and her contact person. After lunch we went shopping since Lidia and I still needed some more 'manteaus'. A manteau is a long, wide and long sleeved shirt that all girls here in Iran have to wear and which is not very easy to find in Europe! In the evening we had dinner in a park close to our dorm and the day finished with tea with some Iranian girls we shared our room with.

The hospital

Since I arrived on a Wednesday, and Thursdays and Fridays are the Iranian weekend, I started my exchange with 2 days off. On Saturday I was supposed to start with my first day shift. But as we anticipated despite our extra trip to the hospital on my first day, no one was really prepared and knew I was coming, so we again went to some offices and arranged everything for the next day.

During the four weeks that I worked in the emergency department I got a very good idea of how it is to work in such a busy part of the hospital. In Groningen, I had just finished my bachelor. So I did not really have a lot of experience with actual patients. Here I could observe and even actively participate in a lot of examinations and treatments, e.g. I could stitch various laceration victims, intubate, analyse CT scans and lab results.

I had very close contact to other students, doctors and various professors. Most of them were very open and helpful. They translated the patient's medical histories, explained why the patients came into the ER and we discussed various interesting cases. We also spend most breaks talking about all kinds of things, e.g. similarities and differences between the health systems in the Netherlands and in Iran. Some things were very peculiar, e.g. when it comes to the payment of care in the hospital. Every time a patient comes into the ER, a doctor gives a list with all needed materials and medications to someone who accompanies the patient. This person has to pick up and pay all these things at a little office in the ER, and then the doctors can start the treatment. In the Netherlands, most of this material would be freely available for the doctors and later the patient or the patient's health insurance would be billed with the costs.

Another difference is that most after care is hospital based and there is almost no home care system. That often prolongs the time the patients have to stay in the hospital and can lead to overcrowding and long waiting lists.



All in all, the ER is not as well organized as it would be in Europe. Lab results for example can be unreliable and very late. The ER in the Imam Khomeini hospital is divided into three separate areas. One is for internal care patients and patients who had to be reanimated, the second is for victims of all kinds of accidents and the third is kind of a waiting area before the patients can be transferred to other departments. As many doctors pointed out, this separation often leads to overcrowding in one area whilst the others are almost empty. In the Netherlands I experienced a better distribution of patients.

With other exchange students I also followed lectures. Unfortunately these were mainly in Farsi and we could only understand the English PowerPoint slides.

We had access to all parts of the medical faculty and the hospital. We visited the medical library, some laboratories and got a tour of the extensive grounds of the faculty. In the hospital we had at first no separate rooms, to have a break or take a nap during the night shifts. Later they finished the so-called 'intern-pavilion', an area for doctors and students to eat, relax and sleep. Unfortunately, this area was gender-segregated, which made it impossible to even just talk to male doctors and interns during meals or a break.

Social programme

We had a very extensive and interesting social programme. A team from the local IFMSA planned everything and every exchange student got a personal contact person. Often we did things together, e.g. visiting various museums, parks, just walked around Tehran or had Iranian food. One weekend, all exchange students and some Iranian students even went together to Esfahan, a city about 500km away from Tehran.

A lot of Iranian students also helped me to organize the trip I did when the actual exchange was already over. One student arranged that I could sleep at her aunt's place in Mashhad, another student helped me to book all kinds of tickets for the bus and train.

Conclusion

Before I came to Tehran, I did not really know what to expect. I thought I was thoroughly prepared, but still this country was full of surprises. I had so much contact to amazing people and was able to experience this country as a normal tourist never would. Iran has a rich culture and is still rather genuine and in no way westernized. Everyone was very welcoming and especially while I travelled around the country after the exchange I got to know so much about its rich history. Most importantly though, I learned about the everyday life of medical professionals in a very stressful ward and about how they are able to find a way of working sometimes with, and sometimes around political and religious boundaries.



Having coffee in a café in the north of Tehran



That's Iran



IFMSA-NL

International Federation of Medical
Students' Associations - the Netherlands



In the hospital

