GEMx-SNO INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE
INTERNSHIP REPORT

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EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE:

Pre-departure:

As a medical student, it was my dream to go for an exchange program and to experience the culture and to learn about the health care system in a different country. From my high school days, Tunisia has always fascinated me with its diversified culture and tradition. I was really excited when I received the mail, mentioning that I have been selected for the exchange, that too in the University of Tunis El Manar. But the initial excitement later became confusion and sadness when I had some unexpected trouble with the visa. Till the last moment, I was not sure if I will be able to make it. But finally, everything ended up well and I could attend the World Summit on Social Accountability and fulfill my long cherished dream of an exchange program.
Accommodation and briefing about internship:

The essence of an internship program is teamwork. I was quite sad when I came to know that the other 2 selected winners couldn’t make it to the exchange. But finally, it was my pleasure to have Alejandro from Juan N. Corapas University, Colombia as my companion. Though we have known each other for the past one year, the internship was the beginning of a friendship for a lifetime and a couple of beautiful memories.

The day we reached Tunis, the activity co-ordinator, Chiheb gave us a warm welcome and took us to the apartment arranged for us at Manza Zanc. Though it was distant from the university, the apartment was really nice and we were comfortable. The only little problem was the communication with the owner, who speaks only French and Arabic.

The next day, we were taken to the Hospital La Rabta, department of Infectious and Communicable diseases. As I hail from Kerala, a state in the southern part of India, where infectious and communicable diseases are quite prevalent, I was really curious to learn about the cases here, make out the similarities and differences and learn the treatment modalities.

After a quick and brief introductory session, we joined the case presentation session in the morning. Though it was in French, the interns (Aziz and Ousama) did a great job translating it to English and making us feel comfortable. After the session, we were given briefing about the internship timing and the activities we were supposed to do in the department.
Clinics:

Clinics started with the case presentations in the morning which were very informative. In fact, the difference in the spectrum of infectious disease as compared to the Indian scenario made it really interesting. After the session, we joined for rounds, where the faculty, residents, interns and externs discussed about the cases, in between questions were asked and the professors clarified our doubts. There were 2 floors – one for the male and the other for the female patients. In spite of the busy work, they managed to teach us about the different treatment regimens and we did clinical examination as well. The students (externs) were also really helpful. We also had the opportunity to join the consultant in the outpatient department. We also made a point to read about the cases we saw at the hospital, once we were back in the apartment. A fact which deserves special mention is that, even though language was a barrier, the hospital staff and the patients were very friendly and we felt like being in our home country, in our own hospital and that made us really comfortable.

An interesting case of ‘cannon ball metastases’, in a 54 year old gentleman.
Afternoon session:

In the afternoon session, there were seminars and case discussions. But since everything was in French, we attended a few sessions and then decided to utilize the time to explore the beauty of Tunis and savour the diversified Tunisian cuisines. In spite of the busy schedule, our Tunisian friends spared their time and made sure that we visited the historical places in Tunis and enjoyed the traditional Tunisian dishes. As someone who is allergic to egg, I was worried regarding the food, but I was really happy that my friends were all very understanding and took care of it very well and never made me feel that I am all alone in a foreign country.
Altogether, the exchange program has been the best thing ever happened in my life. It was a great opportunity to learn, to observe and explore, but above all it was a wonderful chance to make friendship which would last for a lifetime and take back a bunch of indelible memories. Not even a single moment, we felt that we were far way from India and Colombia and were in a different country in a different continent. I had to leave early, and I was literally in tears when I said bye to Alejandro and left him alone, as in those 2 weeks, we had really become best friends.

It's hard to bid adieux to people and places which gave us so much to remember. The country, the people, the food, had already taken away a piece of my heart and saying bye to my friends who gifted me the best few days of my life was so hard and I tried my best to hold back the emotion and promise them that I will come back to Tunis .....................
LESSONS LEARNT:

As someone who is really interested in medicine, the first hand experience in the department of infectious and communicable diseases, strengthened my passion for the subject and has inspired me to be a good clinician and dedicate myself for the service of the community. Even though, there is no similarity at all between the community in Tunis and India, I could find similarities in the patient care and the treatment practices and the differences which I could make out in the treatment regimens and the diagnostic approach of the cases can be disseminated among my community and shared with the medical professionals and it can open up the door for future advancement in the arena of patient care. Above all, I learnt that in spite of the dissimilarities, the essence of medical profession, is team work, sharing of knowledge and having an attitude of empathy and concern for the patients and as a future health care provider, I have to develop all these qualities and be the flag bearer for the betterment of the society.

POTENTIAL RESEARCH PROJECT IDEAS:

Antibiotic resistance is an emerging problem in the global scenario. Different studies have been conducted on this at regional and international levels, but SNO has the planned to conduct a study on this, with student community as active participants. The spectrum of antibiotic resistance in different countries will be assessed and a meta analysis will be made at global level. As the first step, it has been discussed in an interactive session with the students at the faculty of medicine, of the University of Tunis El Manar and the study will be the prime initiative of the SNO team 2017.
FUTURE PROSPECTS:

Getting inspiration from this, I thought about the possibility of creating a platform for an exchange program and received the support from the Emergency Medicine department of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Medical College, Kerala, India which is in partnership with the Indo-US Health & Medicine Collaborative. The department is really interested to receive students from around the world and give them first hand experience in trauma care. The outline for a 3 week training programme, dividing trauma care into 3 phases: pre-hospital, in-hospital and post-hospital care is in process and will be sent soon for approval from the Kerala University of Health Sciences. The SNO Team 2017 is looking forward to work on this, with the continued support and encouragement from GEMx and believe that just like the amazing experience we had in Tunis, this would widen the horizon the students and will be an asset in their career as the future health professionals.

“From the deeper recess of my heart, I express my sincere gratitude to GEM-SNO for giving me this wonderful opportunity”

Vishnupriya