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Participant report

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**Erasmus Exchange Report - Greece**

**Greek Healthcare system**
The Greek healthcare system is a mixed one with the NHS, public insurance funds and private sector. Patients do not pay for consultations within the NHS, and contribute 25% towards the cost of medications on prescriptions, including private prescriptions.

**Primary Health Care**
Within the Greek healthcare system, there is no compulsory registration with a GP or a particular health centre. Patients have the freedom of choice to see a specialist for their health problems, either through the NHS or privately (for a fee), and at any health centre they wish. There is no central electronic record system, and patients carry their own health book (with their healthcare number and picture), where doctors can make notes for future references.

GPs do not play the role of gate-keeper as referrals are not required to see the specialists, in clinics or in hospitals. The role of GPs within primary care is not very clear and not well established.

**Rafina Health Centre**
For my exchange I visited Rafina Health Centre. Rafina is a port town in the eastern coast of Athens.

The health centre is fairly large with multiple specialties under the same roof. Specialties included, gynaecology, ophthalmology, ENT, pediatrics, cardiology, respiratory medicine, radiology, orthopaedics, dermatology and psychiatry. They also had a dentist on-board, meaning dental services are also free on the NHS!
The health centre also had its own pathology lab, x-rays, ultrasound and a CT scanner.
The health centre is open 24 hours, with core hours of 8 am to 3 pm, and out-of-hours from 3 pm. During the out-of-hours, only the GPs and GP trainees will be available to assess patients.

On average, Rafina health centre receives between 30-35 patients in the out-patient clinics and approximately 20-25 patients in the emergency room, during the core-hours. Out-of-hours can vary between 10-15 patients a day. Patients travel from nearby towns (even though there maybe a health centre there) because of the services available in Rafina. Not all health centres in Greece have this many specialties under one roof, including the imaging services.

All specialists at the health centre have their own out-patient clinics, during the day, where patients are reviewed for acute and chronic health issues, with and without appointments! As well as the outpatient clinics, health centre also has an acute area (emergency room), where GP or GP trainee will assess patients with acute medical problems. And if necessary, the specialists would be consulted (during core hours) for appropriate management. During out-of-hours patients would be referred to the hospital, they cannot be managed in the emergency room.
During my exchange I rotated myself through some of the specialties (I tried to rotate through specialties that I have not had a chance to rotate through my training so far). I also spent some time in the emergency room with the GPs and GP trainees. This gave me the opportunity to speak to them and find about their training and their role within the health centre.

It was interesting to find out that in Greece, ophthalmologists carried out sight tests and saw patients with acute problems in the health centre, before advising them to go to the hospital, as patients do not need to be formally referred. Opticians were only responsible for selling glasses, contact lenses etc.

**GP Training**

In Greece, undergraduate training is 6 years of medical school, the final year being similar to that of foundation year. So there is no formal foundation training following graduation. And graduates can enter their preferred specialty training straight away, or if they wish they can work in the rural parts of the country. The specialty training is
four years for most specialities, including General Practice. Sub-specialties such as vascular surgery can be up to seven years.

During the four years of training, GP trainees are expected to work in a hospital, rotating through specialties relevant to General Practice, as in the UK. However, Greek trainees spend most of their training time in the hospital, spending only about ten months in the health centre, in their final year, towards the end of their training.

Following the completion of their training, they have the choice to work within the NHS or go private. Most tend to stay within the NHS to gain more experience. Their salary at the health centre is determined by the state. They are expected to do nights and weekends, as part of the on-call rota for out-of-hour services.

**Conclusion**
Overall, the exchange gave me the opportunity to see and appreciate the similarities and differences between the two systems. I also had some cultural experiences, with the help of the NEC, Alexandra Tsipou.