After spending two weeks in the Spanish healthcare system, I have come back to the UK having learnt a lot. I learnt a lot of clinical medicine, which I was not expecting, and also about different ways of running a primary care service.

In Spain GPs work from 0830 until 1500, five days a week. This is in contrast to the UK, where although clinics might be from 0800 until 1800 with a break in the middle, the burden of paperwork and admin tasks makes the working day longer and gruelling. Therefore, although the burden of clinical work appeared to be similar, the bureaucracy appeared much less.

I shadowed GP clinics most days, and had the opportunity to learn about practice nursing, social workers, midwives and paediatricians. I was also able to visit a local community group, working with women in prostitution.

The area in the centre of Palma, Mallorca, was much more ethnically diverse than I was expecting. However, unlike in London, there was no resource for translators apparent, which could cause some difficulties at times.

The emphasis was on chronic disease management. I noticed that there were many more medications available to be used than in the UK NHS, which meant more autonomy and flexibility within clinical medicine.

Prevention also had much more of an emphasis. With my background in public health and interested in lifestyle medicine and preventative health, I found it interesting to see that the paediatricians did routine check ups for children up to the age of 14 years, not just at 6 weeks. However, there were no health visitors. The GPs also did regular check ups when they saw their patients, more routine bloods tests and seemed to be less reactionary and spend time to get to know their patients. This is partly, I think, because there is more continuity of care. Each GP has their own registered list, and those
patients always see that doctor, except in an emergency or if they are on leave. Spain also spends on more of its GDP on health (14% rather than 10% in the UK), and although this does not mean that this is spent in primary care, it appears that there are fewer patients per GP than in the UK (around 1400 compared to 1800).

I had the opportunity to talk about British General Practice at one of the morning teaching sessions within the health centre, in Spanish. These regular teaching sessions inspired me to restart the journal club at my practice, which had dwindled in the previous months. The doctors met regularly in the morning, often for coffee, which promoted wellbeing, in a job which can be quite isolating.

Generally, general practice in Spain is not so different to the UK. The Gps do not see gynaecology, obstetrics, paediatrics which does take out a lot of work, but allows them to focus on the general medicine. The way the centres are run and funded is different, but day to day work is not so alien and I enjoyed learning about all aspects of Spanish healthcare.