

A lesson of empowerment: From Chile to Köln

As a last year medical student from Chile, who is currently studying at the Hospital that was struck by the earthquake and Tsunami last year, that's still awaiting for reconstruction, I was expecting to see and learn from a modernized version of the medicine once I learnt I got accepted to do a 2 month SCOPE exchange in the city of Köln, Germany.

Little I knew reading that card of acceptance that I was going to learn an important lesson from my life there, once this new reality showed me that professions such as Surgery were not meant to be male-dominated, thought that was buried deep down my subconsciousness, learnt after years of passive observership of women doctors selecting more "suitable" specializations back in my home country, once they would get pushed away from those "not so family friendly specializations", as my mother once told me, by their family, friends and peers.

Köln was a great lesson of how medicine invites everyone to participate and succeed in any of the offered paths of specialization, and is only up to us to accept this invitation ignoring the boundaries that some societies set in our minds.

At the Uniklinik, I was surprised to see that several leading roles were held by female doctors, and how impeccably they performed their duties that were once called "for males only". They didn't know this would motivate me to fight against gender-roles stereotypes back home and inspire me to empower my peers to do the same.

I would of course, also learn many other things during my 2 months in Köln: Impeccable surgery techniques and technology, the great impact on health of well informed patients, the relevance of a nice and respectful working environment, the importance of punctuality and the friendliness of the local committee there.

I can't write about my experience there without remarking the differences in medical education, as my tutor there told me "Here you see once, you practice once, and then you do it". Being used to the "you do it, and then you learn" system, this was an incredible opportunity of learning without pressure and with the right timing and pace. Of course, I understood the differences between the 2 realities I was immersed in : in Chile, the medical students have an active role in the medical care of patients, and we also, during our intern years, serve as workers of the hospital, in where our duties and responsibilities affect the functioning of the hospital itself and the health of our patients. In Germany, on the other hand, there is time and resources to enable students to observe and learn, and most of the actions and decisions that actively affect the patient's health are performed by professionals (who, at some times, consult other senior professional to reach consensus). I could of course mention pros and cons of both realities, but I can simply say that the experience of living the two of them enriched my medical education and provided with life and professional lessons that I will cherish for life.