

Exchange your Ideas!

A participant in IFMSA's Exchange program has the chance by taking a clerkship abroad, to become familiar with the public health system of different countries, to explore new places, to make new friends and finally to meet different cultures. When the student is an Exchange Officer in his NMO, he has one more privilege: to get new ideas and become even more motivated so as to improve the Exchange Program in his own country. Being an incoming to a different country makes you an even better exchange officer!

That's the conclusion I reached during August 2016, when I participated in the exchange program. I was a Local Exchange Officer in my LC in Greece and I had the chance to participate in a Professional Exchange in Tunisia. Tunisia is a small, but very beautiful country, which is located in North Africa and their NMO, called Associa-Med, offers an Exchange Program which turned out to be the best experience in my whole life. I had the luck to be an incoming student in LC Sousse, where there was an Exchange Team with members full of motivation and creativity and the result was just amazing: The social program was perfect and I made a new international family there!

When I learned that I would go to Tunisia during the summer, everyone was telling me how well-organized the Exchange Program in that country is. Having been a Local Exchange Officer for one year in my NMO and having already decided that I would put my candidature for the same position for the next year, I took the decision to discuss about the way our NMOs organize exchanges, with the Exchange Team there. I wanted to be open to new ideas and in my own view, I acted correctly.

During that month, I talked with the Exchange Team about many issues having to do with the Exchanges. I came up with ideas that I could never imagine and never heard of. Firstly, I will refer to the Academic Quality, which is the most important part of the program. Some incomings had a clerkship in departments which are not available in my Local Committee and I discovered how many abilities someone might acquire. One of these departments was the Emergency Medicine. Incomings there, had the unique experience to join an ambulance team and be deployed at a scene of emergency. Some of them became increasingly motivated to get more involved in the program of the clinic. As a result, I decided to recruit new professors at the Local Exchange Program and make new departments available, such as the Intensive Care Unit, where I believe that the incomings might develop essential attributes of a physician.

Furthermore, what impressed me in the Exchange was the great Team Building that we all had with the Local Exchange Team. Never had I seen before such a group of incomings crying when it was about time to go back home! In my view, the very well-organized local social program, the fact that at least one member of the Exchange Team was always with us and that we were staying all together in the same building and not in different ones, were the reasons why the people I met in Tunisia became my second family. Although some of us were from utterly different countries with different cultures, we succeeded in becoming good friends. What I would like to see different in my LC after my exchange is exactly the team building methods that I got introduced to in Tunisia, and I have already started organizing it!

I consider that an exchange can be a unique experience for an Exchange Officer. It combines knowledge, fun, making friends but it can also be very educational and it can push you to take the Exchange Program one step forward. Innovation and creativity might be attributes you are born with, but the key to success is lifelong learning. If an Exchange Officer grabs every chance that would help him achieve this (i.e. Trainings or Meetings) and take the most of it, he could offer to his incomings exchanges of high quality!

In conclusion, this Exchange motivated me to continue being a Local Exchange Officer in my LC and I came back home full of new ideas! I really cannot wait for the next time when incomings come to my country so as to provide them with the same experience as I had in Tunisia and even better! So, I'm waiting all of you in LC Larisa, Greece!

GEORGIOS ATHANASAKIS

NMO: HeIMSIC

University of Thessaly