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Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Multicultural Exchanges in Medical Education: A Travelogue from Graz, Austria

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Austria at a Glance:

Metric	Austria	USA (for reference)
Official Language	German	English
Population Size (2023)	9,130,429	343,477,335
Health Expenditure as % of GDP (2021)	12.1%	17.36%
# Doctors per 10,000 People (2022)	54.3	36.8
Average Life Expectancy (2021)	81 years	76.4 years

Data collected from the World Health Organization

The Medical University of Graz:

- Participated in the Multidisciplinary Course in Pediatric Medicine
- 19 students ranging from second-year medical students to residents, hailing from 13 different countries
- Rotated through four pediatric subspecialties, one per week: Radiology, Hematology-Oncology, Surgery, Gastroenterology
- Attended a daily lecture series on various areas of medicine, including plastic surgery, trauma, and genomics



The Medical University of Graz academic building



Myself outside of the pediatric clinic entrance

My experience:

I entered this program expecting to apply my medical knowledge to clinical scenarios, learn about the Austrian healthcare system, and enjoy the cultural offerings of the area. I accomplished all these things, but what stuck with me the most were the many stories about healthcare and medical education I heard from my international peers. The following represent snippets of what medical school is like in a few of my peers' home countries:

Austria

- 6 years of medical school, no undergraduate degree
- Clinical rotations are largely observation-based
- After graduation, students spend 9 months rotating through specialties in a more hands-on way
- The only cost is €25,20 per semester (approx. $29.23), which goes toward the student union

Canada

- 4 years of medical school after undergraduate degree
- Timeline and organization are very similar to the US
- Strong emphasis on research



From left to right: Vithuyan, myself, Bella, Kate

Poland

- 6 years of medical school, no undergraduate degree
- Stronger emphasis on physical exam skills than imaging and diagnostic studies

Peru

- 7 years of medical school, no undergraduate degree
- After graduation, students spend one year working as the only doctor in a remote part of the country, often requiring many days of arduous travel to reach

South Africa

- After graduation, the government places new physicians where needed for a period of community service work



From left to right: Katarina (Greece), Vithuyan (Canada), Bella (Canada), myself, Kate (Canada), Anonymous, Ariana (Peru), Rosa (Peru), Anita (Kosovo)

Conclusion:

Despite differences in access to resources, standard insurance practices, or cultural norms, we all shared a strong work ethic and commitment to serving our patient populations to the fullest. This experience enriched my understanding of how medicine is taught and practiced around the globe, and it provided me new insights on how to approach my own medical education. By fostering avenues for cross-cultural communication between students, medical schools can allow us to learn from and inspire one another.

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