

TRAINING BURSARY PROGRAMME REPORT (2019)

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Training bursary programme destination: Hôpital De Hautepierre, Strasbourg

1) What was the motivation to apply for training in this Center? / Main objectives

During the program as resident in Rheumatology in my home country, I developed the idea of doing an internship abroad, for at least 3 months. I had never done experiences abroad before, not even at university level.

This idea stemmed from the desire to confront myself with a different reality, to improve my knowledge and to get out of the “comfort zone”, challenging myself.

Secondary objectives were to perfect a foreign language, English or French, and to create links with other colleagues. Having since always a predilection for the sphere of connective tissue diseases and above all for Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, I wanted to perform my eventual stage in a center of reference for SLE.

During the last meeting of the Italian Society of Rheumatology I witnessed the report by Professor Laurent Arnaud, which really impressed me. Then I had the opportunity to find out his publications and get interested: I was therefore informed about the possibility of doing an internship at the Hopital de Hautepierre in Strasbourg, where Prof Arnaud works. When the tender from the SLEuro group was released, I decided to participate, but if I hadn't been awarded I think I would probably have asked for the opportunity to do this internship anyway.

2) How the objectives were fulfilled by the training? / Description of activities

From the first day of the stage I took part in the activities of the Rheumatology department at the Hopital de Hautepierre.

The day of work began at 08.45 am with a collegial briefing in which an update on the department's activities was set, with a particular focus on admissions and resignations, where all the medical and paramedical figures (nurses, psychologists, dieticians, physiotherapists) of the service participated.

On Mondays a patient's round was done with the “chef de clinique” (i.e. the section chief in the person of dr Flora Sagez), in order to evaluate all patients together with residents and to decide clinical strategies in terms of diagnosis and treatment; on Monday afternoons I attended consultations with Professor Arnaud, who cared for most of the patients diagnosed with Lupus followed at Hautepierre. On that occasion, I had more chance to collect data for the study proposed to the SLEuro group: I visited Lupus patients with professor Arnaud, then we assigned a Physician Global Assessment score independently, before having exams' results (evaluating only the clinical presentation) and after having seen all laboratory and investigational results. This method has allowed me to collect complete data of 34 patients.

Every Thursday morning the patient round was done with the “chef de service” (Prof Arnaud himself), while in the afternoon there was a collegial meeting to discuss difficult cases in terms of diagnostic approach and therapeutic choices. Moreover, monthly, every first Thursday, a journal club was held between residents: in this occasion two rheumatological trending topics were presented and discussed together, after a brief Power Point presentation.

In this way I was able to carry out my activity as resident, taking care of patients and participating in case management, visiting most of the patients with Lupus who were followed at the hospital.

3) What are the main opportunities / strengths this center offers for future applicants?

Although I did a short internship I believe that the experience in this center allowed me to grow, both from a personal and a professional point of view: I believe that the merit is due in part to the excellent organization of the structure but above all to the personal commitment of Professor Arnaud in guiding, engaging and teaching me.

In particular, rheumatology service at the Hôpital de Hautepierre allows to see many different pathologies, enabling to have a view on a broad spectrum of diseases, from arthritis to connective tissue diseases, vasculitis, bone diseases with a special focus on rare diseases. Personally this training in Strasbourg gave me the possibility to examine Lupus of different ethnicities, with different clinical presentations (not only Caucasians as in my usual experience); another strength of this center is represented by the opportunity to evaluate different approaches, from ambulatory consults to ordinary hospitalization or day hospital. Last but not least, this experience gives the chance to do clinical research.

4) Practical advice for future applicants to the SLEuro training bursary

My first and most important advice for future applicants to the SLEuro training bursary in Strasbourg is to know French: although I had studied French in college for 8 years, I had several difficulties in the first weeks. I recommend to have a good level in French (at least B2), in order not to waste time and efforts in trying to understand colleagues and patients!

The second advice is, obviously, to have a global knowledge in Rheumatology, not to be specialized in a single entity, because the service of Rheumatology in Hautepierre, even if it's a reference center for Lupus and Rare diseases, deals with all rheumatological syndromes, also in pediatric age.

I am very grateful for this opportunity. I surely recommend this experience, so intense and full.