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Date and time:

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Location / Venue:

Berlin, Germany

Photo: Exchange participants in Prague

Between 16th October and 12th November 2016, four University of Nairobi (UoN) medical students had the brilliant opportunity of spending some time in the Charité – Universitätsmedizin in Berlin, Germany, as part of a bilateral student exchange program between the two institutions.

This followed efforts by one of the students at the Charité University Hospital, Mathias Krisam, and the magnanimous support of the B. Braun company. Mathias, who had previously interned in parts of Africa, Kenya included, noted how difficult it was for most of us here to access similar opportunities mainly due to financial constraints. And it was this epiphany that eventually begot this particular exchange program. The exchange program is research oriented, with students selected from each university spending a month in the partner university working on a research topic as well as taking part in a clinical rotation of their choice.



Photo: Introduction to nuclear medicine with Prof. Dr. med. Winfried Brenner

The selection process starts with an announcement of the program, after which medical students are allowed to submit their application. This includes a statement of interest, résumé, and a letter of support from their tutor. The applications are then reviewed and the successful applicants selected. At the University of Nairobi end, the process is facilitated by Prof. Nilesh Patel (Department of Human Physiology, UoN) and Dr. Peter Maturi (Department of Hematology, UoN). The exchange program's success so far is also attributed to the unparalleled support it has received from the Dean of Students' University of Nairobi Prof. Were and the Charité International Cooperation (ChIC) at the Charité. The following depicts the experience of the four Kenyan students (namely: Mong'are Newnex Brian, Nelson Mpekethu, Bridged Osebe and Peninah Achieng'), the program's maiden participants, who had the excellent opportunity of doing their clinical electives at the Charité University Hospital in Berlin, Germany.



Photo: Exchange participants meeting Dr. Aykac in the “Evangelische Geriatriezentrum” - Geriatrics’ hospital

Nelson: “When I boarded the plane to Tegel airport, Berlin, I would not have suspected that the forthcoming experience would be as exciting as it was. Our exchange partners were nothing short of amazing. They made me feel very welcome, both at Charité University and my residence at the Treptower Park apartment. The fond memories of Berlin, Prague and the beautiful and green countryside are still with me and will be a strong source of inspiration for years to come. The quiet moments we spent in the apartment chatting away as well as the educational visit we took to the department of nuclear medicine are just memorable. I am deeply grateful for the exposure I got.”

Newnex: “Prague, with its rich history and magnificent architecture, has got to be the most beautiful city in the world! Furthermore, I now completely understand what is meant by the phrase ‘German efficiency’. They are ruthlessly efficient, a quality I admire and seek to emulate. I especially enjoyed, meeting and interacting with the CEO of B. Braun Prof. Dr. Heinz-Walter Große, an admirably humble man with whom we interacted very freely. I hope to be as inspiring, intelligent and charming as he is. In addition, this experience was vast, ranging from the surgical wards and theatres where we were exposed to advanced surgical interventions such as robotic prostatectomy, to adoptable policies when it comes to nosocomial infection prevention and control that can be implemented to help improve our local setting. In all, it truly was an extraordinary learning experience.”

Bridged: “This exchange has been an eye-opener for me. It has broadened my perspective of medicine and life generally. I rotated through obstetrics and gynecology and carried out research in care for the elderly. The highlight of my experience was the well-informed patient that was inquisitive and well aware of their situation along with the simple, organized ward system. Basic practice like hand sanitization was followed through thoroughly. Visits to the geriatric hospital and a home for the aged were very informative about the practice of geriatrics.

The B.Braun plant in Melsungen was particularly wonderful. We had a workshop on basics of hand hygiene and the importance of this was reiterated. Health Care Providers need to spearhead this practice.”

Peninah: “This was a once in a lifetime opportunity which I will always appreciate. It was enlightening to experience a new culture with new people. At the Charité I got a chance to see advancements in the field of nuclear medicine, surgery and infection control. This helped me pick up a lot of new information which can be implemented in our own setting. Outside the hospital I got a chance to visit other European cities. I also got a chance to visit a museum about the Holocaust in Germany. An all-rounded worthwhile experience that helped me get a better sense of the people.”



Photo: Nelson & Newnex rotating surgery

Newnex and Nelson rotated Surgery, while carrying out research on nosocomial infections. Bridged rotated the Obstetrics/Gynaecology and Geriatric departments while carrying out research on care of the elderly. Peninah rotated Pediatrics, while carrying out research on inoculation practices. The program being largely student based, meant that the tandem exchange partner was tasked with ensuring that the incoming exchange student gets the most out of the exchange, not only in terms of settling in, but also in terms of organizing learning opportunities. The exchange partners were incredibly supportive. We also got as much help as we needed from the tutors, medical professors and doctors at the Charité University Hospital, with regards to the study topics. The exchange students from Germany (namely: Ilona Gottschalk, Lilly Koglin and Amelie Göhlich) spent some time at the Kenyatta National Hospital earlier this year.



With the experiences the participating students have had thus far, especially in learning from the partner medical institution; it is thrilling that by doing so, the exchange program in itself has ended up being in tune with the sponsor's modus operandi, 'Sharing Expertise.'

"Every institution wants to be global or international, but it doesn't get more international than this; seeing all of you in-front of us right now as you share your experience and emotions over the past one month"

– Ulrike Arnold, Head of ChIC, Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin.



Photo: Meeting with the Dean School of Medicine UoN

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Links:

[1] <http://med-school.uonbi.ac.ke/category/image-galleries/school-medicine-photos/student-exchange-program-charite%CC%81-uon>

[2] [http://med-school.uonbi.ac.ke/sites/default/files/chs/medschool/medschool/Bilateral student exchange program between UoN an](http://med-school.uonbi.ac.ke/sites/default/files/chs/medschool/medschool/Bilateral%20student%20exchange%20program%20between%20UoN%20and%20Charite%20Universitaetsmedizin%20Berlin.pdf)