

World Congress of Neurology, Marrakech, 12-17 November 2011

About one week and a half before the World Congress of Neurology, I received the official confirmation from our beloved LORMA. I had applied two months and a half in advance and when I opened the email, even though I was really excited about the great opportunity I had, a fear paralyzed me: what about the tickets? Universe seemed to be pleasant that I was accepted because for the exact dates I had to fly there were very cheap flights to Marrakech (not for the day before, neither for the day after).

So, on November the 12th at 6 am, I leaved AECS' flat to the airport, very tired and a bit scared for attending such an important meeting with neurologists, neurosurgeons, doctors (and me). Probably more than a bit scared. But finally I landed in Marrakech and managed to reach the city and cross the medina to my charming backpacker hostel. And eventually, after a cold shower (not everything could be charming in a 6€/night hostel), I went to the conference centre where the Congress was being held.

When I opened the participant bag and read the topics of all workshops, I felt extremely excited and undecided... Plenary sessions in the morning looked great, but all the workshops looked extremely interesting. So hard to make a decision! In the end, and following my reasoning, I chose those who were more related with statistics and reviews. Partly because I am a geek-statistics-girl, partly because I thought it would be easier to understand for a medical student than a high-level medical discussion about treatment comparisons, and partly because I found it was easier to extrapolate to global health, which is part of our mission statement and I thought it could be useful for more people in the association.

I think I made the right decision because during these five days I found all the connections I had missed or undervalued between neurology and non-communicable diseases and the importance for neurological patients of NCDs high-level recognition; between neurology and social determinants of health; between neurology and access to essential care in different countries in the world... I found a real and strong link between what I learnt about Neurology in my Catalan University and in my clerkship in Hong Kong, and what I do everyday in IFMSA. And for sure, I understood much better the political dimension of this already incredible specialty.

If I had to choose only one of the workshops, for sure it would have been the one I attended about brain infections. Of course I had a previous knowledge about the topic, but with my perspective as a student from the global North, brain infections were not the main topic in my curriculum. Neurosyphilis, Cerebral Malaria, Neurocysticercosis, TB... were only a 5-pages-chapter in my neurology notes. Even Meningitis approach was different when African doctors talked!

At the end of all presentations, a question round was opened and a lady with a strong American accent asked a clever question I've thought about a lot since then. She realized that in one of the Neurosyphilis clinical trials the doctor hadn't mentioned they tested patients for any other STD, including HIV infection. Doctor gave two main reasons; first was that the incidence of STDs and HIV in Morocco was too low to test it, and secondly, that culturally, it wasn't very well accepted. She replied that if we don't test patients, incidence will be low everywhere. Few weeks later, talking about this with a friend, I knew there had been a similar case in Australia.

I thought a lot about it. How medical practice is affected by cultural-related aspects, and how we, future doctors of a completely globalized world should be exposed to that, but also, how we, future teachers of next generations should be able to transmit this need to our future students.

Coffee breaks and lunch breaks were perfect to interact with other participants. There were absolutely any of them who weren't surprised for my student condition. Every single time it happened I had the same feeling: I was the luckiest medical student in the world, surrounded by such an enriching environment, I was the first (I hope of many) medical student invited to this

congress. I was seeing from a student perspective the medical reality, where doctors discuss problems they are facing. This amazing feeling came to me days after, when I was writing the report and I made following reflection: if we, students, can see in first person the challenges researchers are facing, we can compare it with our current official curricula and see the lacks and what we should fight for to have a better education. Attending the World Congress of Neurology was not only a personal opportunity of improvement and an opportunity for IFMSA people to get contacts and ideas for our projects, but also an opportunity for worldwide medical students of today and tomorrow to change our education for the best.

Finally in my last day in Marrakech I had a meeting with Professor Grisold, with whom our LORMA has been working, as he is co-chair of the Education committee in the World Federation of Neurology. After a workshop where he was chair and presented a review, we had a coffee and further discussed our collaboration. I was gladly surprised medical students were not only in their minds but in their priorities. As I knew from Pablo before the congress, they had created the Neurology checklist for our logbooks (the same one I had used in my exchange in Hong Kong). It was very interesting and great news to discover their perspective of the checklist and their aim to improve it, and led me to review my own logbook and reflect about my exchange with a new point of view.

I really hope this is the first of many articles about medical students in Neurology Congresses.

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