

Mirka Blommé, 2010

At the end of my specialization in OB/gyn, I applied for and received the NFOG visitor's grant. This was used to visit the department of women's health in Tampere, Finland. Due to demands of scheduling from my home clinic, and the demands of three children at home, the visit took place one week in September and one week in December.

My main contacts at Tampere University Hospital, TAYS, were Dr Tomas and Dr Uotila. They, professor Mäenpää, and all their colleagues welcomed me graciously for my two weeks at the clinic.

My time was mostly spent in the maternal/fetal outpatient clinic. I also made some forays into the ER, the delivery room, the antenatal ward, and the oncology ward. I was very lucky to happen to be at the clinic when they had interesting training sessions for their doctors. One afternoon was dedicated to obstetrical drills in handling shoulder dystocias, breach deliveries, and instrumental deliveries. The second week I was there, there was an afternoon of lectures on diabetes and pregnancy. I also had the opportunity to participate in a lecture series on oncological topics held for the gynaecologists of the catchment area.

TAYS is the tertiary referral centre for a population of about a million. This means that roughly the amount of Maternal-Fetal cases that in the greater Stockholm area are shared between five hospitals, are here seen in one hospital unit. This was excellent for getting to see many interesting cases. Sacral teratomas, large hygromas, Bombay blood group mother, spina bifida, triplet delivery, gastroschisis, several heart malformations, anencephaly, mother with previous torsion of the uterus, and many more interesting cases were seen just in the two weeks I spent there.

Healthcare in Finland is of course very similar to that in Sweden. Tampere is a modern teaching hospital with available up to date resources including DaVinci laparoscopy robot and 3D fetal ultrasound. Evidence based medicine is striven for, and staff research is encouraged. When similarities are so great, one pays all the more attention to where practices differ; and they do. I think one of the most educational aspects of a visit like this is to realize that clinics up to date with the latest evidence and know-how can still come up with rather different guidelines for patient care.

TAYS provided women giving birth with pain relief in the form of epidurals, spinal anaesthesia and PCB to a much greater extent than Huddinge University hospital in Sweden which is comparable in size and patient population. TAYS used Cytotec more liberally and with less monitoring for the induction of labour, while the use of balloon catheters was sparing. These are examples of the way a clinic's traditions influence treatment programs.

Finland, and perhaps especially Tampere, is a very ethnically homogenous country compared to Sweden. This was evident in the patient population, with very few immigrants, and no consultations requiring a translator during my two weeks at the clinic. At my clinic a significant part of the population is born outside Sweden, and translators are used daily. Even when a conversation is carried out in adequate Swedish, many nuances in patient-doctor contact are lost due to cultural and linguistic barriers.

Patients at TAYS were given ample information during consultations, but there was less dialogue with patients, and essentially none with the patients' spouses. I got the impression that this mirrors that the whole society is more apt to trust in authority figures than in Sweden, where patients question healthcare workers to a greater extent.

The doctors' work was carried out more efficiently and with more patients seen per day than in Sweden. A midwife or nurse was in attendance in the consultation room, and took care of much of the administrative routines of the visit. This is an unheard of luxury in Sweden, where a lot of time is spent hunting down nurses or midwives to convey treatment plans and orders, filling in lab requests, and scheduling follow up appointments etc.

In conclusion I saw a lot of interesting cases, and learned a lot from the doctors of the clinic. I was especially impressed with the skills of the doctors in training at the hospital. It was great to get to visit Finland, and get acquainted with the pleasant city of Tampere. I even caught the tail end of Finland's Independence Day, which was the Monday of my second week in Tampere. I thank the doctors of TAYS for hosting me, and I especially thank NFOG for this learning opportunity.