

JU-LMU Exchange 2022 – Report from the JU students

Exchange period: April 26th – June 25th 2022

1. Before the exchange

When we first heard that we will have the chance to come to Germany during one of our digital exchange sessions with LMU students, we were very excited but also concerned as we were told by the exchange coordinators we had only few weeks to get the documentations we need. All of us did not have passports by that time, so we had to start the process from scratch.

The first step was getting passports, which were needed urgently in order to book us visa appointments at the German Embassy in Addis Ababa. With a support letter written from Jimma University, we went to Immigration, Nationality, and Vital Events Agency in Addis Ababa and we were able to get passports within 3 days.

Medical certificate was also a requirement for the application process. We went to Jimma Medical Center in Jimma University to obtain the medical certificate and they did physical examinations (like visual acuity test at the ophthalmology department, hearing test) and laboratory investigations (HIV, Hepatitis B and C, Blood group) and chest x-ray. Female students were in addition required to take urine-hCG test. Although some of the tests were not asked for the exchange application by LMU, they were certainly required by Jimma Medical Center to get medical certificate.

Covid vaccination, of at least two doses, was also required for the application. We got the vaccination easily at the hospital and health centers in Jimma but getting authenticated vaccine certificate which was needed for travel purposes was challenging. We had to go to Addis Ababa and get the authentication from Oromia Health Bureau and Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other vaccinations were not mandatory for the application process, we were asked which vaccinations we have already taken and told by the coordinators that we can get the missing vaccines in Germany.

Before our visa appointment date, we had an online-meeting with the coordinators from LMU and Dr. Million Tesfaye, an LMU alumni, to prepare us for the appointment. Letter of invitation, flight tickets, and proof of accomodation were sent to us by the coordinators from LMU. Jimma University also gave us transcript of our academic records and a support letter written to the Embassy to help with the process. We bought a travel health insurance in Addis Ababa and we were ready for the appointment. The visa process went smoothly except for two students; one was denied visa initially and for the other, the embassy made the mistake of putting an unnecessary stamp and needed correction. Thanks to the strong effort of the coordinators, both issues were fixed.

Once we had the documentations we needed, we submitted the LMU exchange application form with guidance from the coordinators. We had a lot of help during the preparation including from the exchange coordinators in LMU, Dr. Million Tesfaye,

and Jimma University administration and we want to thank all of them. The major problem we encountered during the preparation was, as we had to travel to Addis Ababa several times to get the documentations we needed, it costed us a lot of time and money. We had to cover the fees for passport, health insurance, travel, food and stay in Addis Ababa and that put a lot of strain on us. Being forced to leave our hospital activities multiple times has also made us lag behind others and work additional time to compensate for it.

2. The first month: Traumatology/ Orthopedics

During our first month, we had the most wonderful stay at the Department of Orthopedics at LMU. We were welcomed by Prof. Dr. Hans Roland Dürr, who took us to the morning meeting and introduced us to the professors and residents. Everyone was nice and welcoming, and that has made us feel at home and rid of the uncertainty we had on what to expect. During our one month of stay in the department, we were assigned to different subspecialties where we were able to see as well as be part of some of the procedures that we hadn't encountered up to that point.

In tumor orthopedics, we learned about different malignant as well as benign orthopedic tumors pre-operatively at orthopädie ambulantes and intraoperatively in the operation theaters. The professors, the residents, nurses and every staff member were cooperative and tried their best to teach us and help us with everything we needed despite their busy schedules.

In our trauma session we saw so many impressive surgical procedures that we only knew on books.

At the orthopädie ambulantes, we were able to see how the patients are evaluated when they come with any musculoskeletal complaints for the first time and how their followup should continue. Language barrier was the biggest challenge we faced as we couldn't understand what was being discussed with the patients, but the residents and professors helped us with translation as well.

3. The second month: Gynecology/ Obstetrics

Our second month stay was in the Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics. Given the limited time we had and the number of knowledge and skills we needed to acquire, we were divided in groups of fours, and we did rotations in the delivery Room, postnatal care, Gynecology OP 1 and Gynecology OP 2 each week.

In the delivery room, we spent most of our time in two main areas. The first one is antenatal care, where pregnant mothers and their fetus are evaluated, high risk pregnancies are identified and discussions were held with mothers about the risks and subsequent steps. Prenatal screenings were done and we were able to see genetic

diseases which are not common in our country, like thalassemia, being identified. The second main area is sonography for pregnant woman. In this service we were able to observe multiple obstetric ultrasound being done for mothers in their second and third trimester. What was even more interesting is that we got the chance to do ultrasound examination. The residents were very nice; they explained and taught us basic obstetric ultrasound skills which are invaluable for our future practice. We also had the chance to assist in cesarean section.

In postnatal care, we start our work at 7:40am by taking blood samples for laboratory investigations as well as securing IV lines. Then we do round sessions. Even though the rounds were in Deutsche, the Professors and residents were helping us by translating for us in English. Here we also saw pregnant mothers admitted with late pregnancy complications. We appreciated that strong interdepartmental link exists as we have witnessed neonates are examined by pediatricians before discharge at the postnatal care. In the afternoon we attended examination for postpartal women as well as postnatal counseling with ward resident.

Similar to Postnatal care, we start out activities in Gynecology OP1 and OP2 by taking blood sample and securing IV lines followed by round. After round we were usually going to the OR We were amazed by the advanced techniques and instruments they use in surgeries. We have got a chance to scrub in and assist several surgeries. Some of them were completely new for us like laparoscopic diagnostic surgery for endometriosis and breast prosthetic implant after mastectomy. We have also assisted in some surgeries that took very long time to complete, like debulking surgery for ovarian cancer. It was tiresome at the same time we were happy that we got an opportunity to assist in this surgery with expert professors.

4. Special Fridays

Fridays during our stay in Munich were special and exciting as we went to a new department (other than orthopedics and gynecology) every week and had the privilege of sharing their experience. Among the departments we visited are neurosurgery, anesthesiology, pediatric cardiology, heart catheterization, internal medicine, surgical endoscopy, radiology and ENT.

In neurosurgery, we had the pleasure of observing advanced brain surgeries being performed. Among the surgeries we got to experience was a microvascular decompression done for a patient with trigeminal neuralgia refractory to medical treatment. The surgeon explained every step of the advanced operation, which made our experience remarkable.

During our stay at anesthesiology department, we got to see advanced anesthesia machines and the anesthesiologist explained how they are used during surgery. We

had the chance to be with the anesthesiology team during preoperative, operative and postoperative period and we learned what is done during each period. As we experienced different surgeries being performed in the operating room, from the anesthesiology side, the anesthesiologist was explaining to us about the operations and what complications to expect in each case. Everything was new and very interesting to us. Some of us also had the chance to intubate a patient while being observed by the anesthesiologist.

While we were in pediatric cardiology, we had a brief but very interesting discussion about the anatomy of the heart and common congenital anomalies of the heart. We then proceeded to learn how to operate the echocardiography machine and practiced it on each other. The highlight of the day was seeing children on ventricular assisted devices, "Berlin Heart," which was a new and surreal experience.

During our internal medicine department stay, we started the day with a seminar presentation on Basic Life Support. Even though it was in German language, we were able to understand most of it and it was very interesting. At the station, we did rounds with the doctors and each case was explained to us. We also assisted by drawing blood from the patients for laboratory.

In surgical endoscopy we had a warm welcome from the friendly staff and we observed different procedures like, gastroscopy, colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy being performed either for diagnostic or therapeutic purposes.

Heart catheterization was a new and fascinating experience for all of us; we observed aortic valve replacement being performed in several patients. The doctors were very intuitive in teaching us every step of the procedure and also explained to us the state of the art equipment they use.

In interventional radiology, we were first briefly given instructions about safety measures we need to take as we will be exposed to radiation. After which we went on to observe several CT guided procedures being done. We were impressed to see several difficult procedures, which required extreme caution and steady hands to avoid the associated major complication, done successfully.

In ENT, we were again assigned with a doctor who took us to the operating room and showed us amazing procedures that we would never have had the chance to see in Ethiopia. Lastly, in addition to our activities in Klinikum Grosshadern, we had the pleasure of accompanying the emergency doctor and day and got to attend real life emergency situation and got to be part of the team while they were saving lives. It was one of the most unforgettable moments we had during our stay.

Overall our learning experience in LMU was very interesting as we have acquired ample of theoretical knowledge, skills, and experience. We believe that the organizers did great job in selecting the departments for teaching us and indeed we get to attend and learn lots of sophisticated procedures and experience instruments which were not available in our set up which we believe is the main aim of this exchange program.

5. Extracurricular activities

Our stay in Germany was not limited to just academic activities; rather it was of social and cultural exchange as well, one that was full of adventures and excitements. We spent our first week in Germany, weekends and holidays by spending time with our friends from LMU, going to parks and lakes in Munich, visiting attractions and historical sites and participating in festivals. We also had a chance to visit places outside Munich towards the end of our stay and each and every single day of our stay in Germany was full of new adventures.

Among our frequent destinations were shopping centers in different areas in Munich and the Munich Olympia Park for a walk and game of table football. Marienplatz was one of the first areas we saw, everything was beautiful and the architecture was nothing like we have seen before. We went to stunning places like the English Garden, where we had amazing time celebrating birthdays and playing games WestPark, Lake Tegernsee, Riemer See are among the amazing sceneries we loved so much. We are very impressed by the beautiful historic buildings we saw at Odeonsplatz and the Salsa dancing groups we saw there.

The LMU exchange students and the exchange organizers were planning us several activities to do together during our stay. We were invited to their apartments and got to meet with their families, roommates and friends who came from different areas in Germany and even different countries in some cases, everyone we was happy to see us and made us feel welcomed and at home. We also went to their working places and learned what they do and spent a great time there as well. Moments we spent with them at beer garden, watching sunset at the Hackebrücke and at different parties are very memorable. We also had several nights dedicated for historical and cultural exchange between the German students and us, we learned a lot about Germany and its people, while having lots of fun. We also cooked and shared dishes from both countries, it was very pleasant experience. We consider ourselves lucky to be part of traditional festivities like the Frühlingsfest and Schäfflertanz and very fortunate to watch a football game at the Allianz Arena. What made it even more special was, it was the season's last game and Bayern München was the Deutchmeister and we had unforgettable moment celebrating with the fans.

Towards the end of our stay, we visited the Dachau concentration camp memorial site, it was a unique experience learning the history and stories of the survivors and those who perished at the exact site where it happened. We are impressed by those who preserved the site and admitted everything that was done there for future generations to learn from and not repeat the same mistake. We also visited Aschaffenburg and Frankfurt during our last weekend, we visited Ethiopian families who lived there and had amazing time. The two months we spent in Germany was full of joy and excitement and everything that we shared has created a strong bond among ourselves and with our friends from LMU and we are ever grateful for it.

6. Cultural differences

During our 2 month stay in Germany we have noticed how people of different nations could have so much similar characters. We were so pleased by the way the exchange students from LMU took care of us, and how we got along well as if we have known each other for long. We could say we have seen so much similarity in our culture; however, we have noticed important differences that are worth mentioning.

'Plans for the weekend': this phrase is common especially on Fridays. Everyone used to ask us what our plans were for the weekend and we would find no answer for the question as we Ethiopians mostly do things spontaneously without planning.

Friendly professors: the hierarchy in medical school is one of the biggest differences one can clearly notice. In Ethiopia students usually don't have the privilege to talk to the professors comfortably; but in Germany students even dine together with their professors and that's a good experience we have taken home.

Medical school: most of the medical students we met have some other jobs or degrees in other subjects or other hobbies. That is not the case in Ethiopia, once someone starts medical school it is hard to spend time in other activities other than medicine.

Overall I have seen Germany and the people there to be '*engida tekebay*' (which means welcoming in Amharic) just like in Ethiopia.

We could say we have learned so much from our stay in LMU, and indeed brought back values to our own life. There are many to mention, but the most important is how time is valued. Most activities in the clinic began and ended at the exact time they were supposed to. We all remember how Prof. Siebeck gave us 15 minutes break during meetings and continued the meeting at the 16th minute.

The other value we brought back is, people in Germany are very sensible and respect each other's privacy. This is especially true in the wards and outpatient departments as the patients themselves are the ones that decide what happens to them. The patients are respected and served as their wish.

Another is how people respect the structure and laws of society. Every German is a policeman for himself and for his community and will not pass any wrong doing uncorrected. We also learned that there is honor and pride in any job done well. People were always thankful for even the smallest things. People in Germany are hardworking and efficient. They are quiet practical and they try to find solution for nearly every problem. They are well organized and live their life with plans. Straightforwardness, being able to reflect ones opinion and saying what felt needed to be said, is also among the important values we have learned from people of Germany.

In summary, our eight weeks stay was a very productive and enjoyable one, in which we were able to advance ourselves both academically and socially. We understand the huge effort and collaboration that went into making it a successful experience and we are deeply grateful to everyone who has made this exchange possible. We hope to work closely with the organizers to help next generation of students exchange in any way we can.

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