Scouring the internet for any resources about securing an elective in France, there was one site that I kept coming back to- the Anglo-French Medical Society page. I read through pages of past reports from students who had been to a wide range of francophone countries and felt an increasing motivation to keep searching for a hospital that would take me on as an elective student. Brexit ensured this was no easy feat. When I finally managed to secure a spot in Hospital Pasteur, Nice, I was over the moon. An incredible chance to practise my French, experience living in France for a month and to get to know the French healthcare system. However my initial joy quickly turned to doubt as I revised for my medical school exams, mentally trying to translate the odd phrase into French to see how I would get on in Nice. I began to realise that my A level French had done nothing to prepare me for the medical language and abbreviations I would need to learn to get by in a busy French emergency department. This became a source of stress that tarnished the excitement of my upcoming elective. Luckily, I remembered something that could help me from one of the AMFS web pages- a medical french course. I hovered over the send button for my application- speaking french for a whole weekend with a bunch of strangers? But then I reminded myself in summer I would spend a whole month speaking french with a bunch of strangers, and hit send.

Months passed, my finals came and went, and then it was time for the course. I took a train from Cumbria to London, then took my first Eurostar to Lille. I arrived shattered from the journey, sweaty from the packed carriages and the last thing I felt like doing was spending the weekend speaking french. I worried about everyone already having friends they knew there, my lack of speaking practice in French and strict tutors.

After a quick introduction in the breakfast room we headed to a nearby restaurant to meet our groups and eat dinner. I was still feeling apprehensive on the walk there but chatted to a couple of lovely students which got me into the swing of things. By the time we had sat down to eat, my worries had evaporated. I was sat with a group of incredibly friendly people, all from very different walks of life, who I immediately hit it off with. Some people spoke in French but there was no pressure to do so and we mostly stuck to English whilst getting to know each other. I discovered almost everyone had arrived as I had, knowing nobody. Everyone was very like minded and it was interesting hearing all the different reasons why people had taken the course.

The next day passed in a blur, of french lessons, chatting during coffee breaks, lunch then having a mad rush with my roommate to prepare for the gala dinner, discussing the non existent dress code and pondering over heels or no heels. The tutors got us talking, often in pairs with one playing patient and the other playing doctor, much like we do in medical school. My partner and I got a laugh out of making our patients extra interesting (“je n'ai aucun problème médical, seulement sept crises cardiaques!’’). The handbook was an invaluable resource, especially for medical abbreviations.

At the gala dinner I sat with a group of new people, a mix of doctors and students, and I enjoyed the stimulating conversation along with the best food yet and plenty of wine. Later we headed to a bar in Vieux Lille where wine quickly became gin and tonics which became dancing- tutors, GPs, surgeons and students alike!

Sunday morning I was especially grateful for the coffee during breakfast although we had been careful not to make it a late night for the next round of lessons!The walk to the university was refreshing and we were treated to bright blue skies. Already I felt much more confident speaking medical french than the previous day which was a really satisfying feeling. After the last few lessons and talks the good weather continued as we took a walking tour of Lille. After rushing around the town it was lovely to be able to take in the sights at a slower pace whilst learning more about Lille’s history. As the tour came to the end there was a round of goodbyes and promises to stay in touch with those who had to dash off to get home by Monday.

I had the luxury of being able to stay an extra night and I was happy to see that many of the other delegates had chosen to do the same. We sat in the beautiful sun and savoured the last evening together. I was surprised at how quickly we became such good friends and there were plenty of invites to home countries, from Australia to Singapore to Ireland.

Overall, a jam packed weekend that left me with a wealth of resources, contacts and new friends. It has made me a lot more confident about my elective, in terms of making new friends, the language, and what to expect in a French hospital.

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