1. Report by Josephine Guillaud, first year Medical Student, University of Southampton

A Fanta-ch’ti-c weekend in Lille, April 2023

From the first “Bonjour, bienvenue à Lille” to the final “Bon retour”, the Medical French weekend course was a delightful whirlwind of socialising, learning and fun.

Lille acted as a handsome and historic backdrop for the weekend, with Flemish and Haussmannian buildings standing side by side along cobbled streets, and housing a rich selection of independent cafes and shops. The variety of said architecture mirrored the wide range of backgrounds and profiles of the course attendees. Doctors and other medical professionals from many countries and backgrounds, and students at different stages in their medical journeys. What linked us all however was a mutual enthusiasm and desire to learn about the French medical world, whether this be to integrate international organisations such as Médecins Sans Frontières, to facilitate being able to work in a French-speaking country, or simply for the love of speaking French and having a social weekend.

The organisation of the course was superb and seamless, and allowed us to happily drift and chat (preferably in French) from the clean and comfortable hotel to the stunning buildings of the Université Catholique de Lille. Visits to great lillois restaurants also punctuated the trip, and showcased hearty French cuisine, with a particularly good speculoos dessert coming to mind. The sessions were informative, and their interactive elements made them fly by. French vocabulary for everyday clinical use was discussed, and different medical themes were explored, ranging from cardiology to emergency medicine, and gynaecology, just to name a few. Not to mention an extensive English-to-French medical handbook that shall remain a point of reference throughout my career. Although having to think and speak in another language was an intellectually tiring exercise, the group’s encouragements and enthusiasm made for a comfortable learning environment.

Moreover, meeting like-minded Francophiles was wonderfully refreshing, especially in an environment where the differences between the UK and France tend to be more readily highlighted than the need to foster and develop connections. The tutors had diverse and fascinating backgrounds, and showed us through their workshops what some working opportunities could look like, and the richness of these bi-cultural experiences.

My main take-away from the weekend was the openness and eagerness of the kind people I met, and the possibility of broadening my medical horizons into the much-loved French-speaking world.

2. Report by Pippa Whitaker, 5th year Medical Student, Barts and the London

The first thing that surprised me about the weekend was how quick and easy the Eurostar was—having only ever travelled abroad via airports, and being used to British trains, I was expecting a protracted and at least slightly painful journey. It was the complete opposite—security can’t have taken more than 15 minutes and left plenty of time for relaxed coffees. The actual train was only 1hr 20 to Lille, quicker than getting in to London from Bath.   
  
The next surprise was Lille. I hadn’t really heard of it before but had vague notions of it being an industrial sort of place. It is actually a gorgeous, intriguing melting pot of architectural influences, from the neo-Flemish Renaissance style Nouvelle Bourse to the Gothic Église Saint-Maurice de Lille. Its rich history of occupation by countries including the Spanish Netherlands and Germany has left it a unique and fascinating place, although very much home to the excellent food and wine you’d expect of France.   
  
It wasn’t a surprise that the course was beautifully organised and run; the handbook and information provided in advance were impressively comprehensive and Christine [Greenwood] replied to my emails almost before I sent them.   
  
Despite being quite tiring to be packing in an intense amount of French for the first time since GCSEs, it was a relaxing weekend. Apart from almost constantly thinking about medical French, we didn’t have to worry about anything else: delicious meals (which we were guided to), our hotel, a tour (the tour guides were great, so energetic and enthusiastic), and, of course, all of the lessons, were organised for us. Even getting to Université Catholique de Lille for lessons was easy, with the choice of a coach or a walk following some of the tutors.   
  
We didn’t spend much time in them, but the hotel rooms were good value—ensuite, clean, bright, and with a single and a double bed in each. Students shared a hotel room with one other student, and several of us noticed that the people we were sharing with seemed to be chosen to be similar to us which was nice. My roommate was absolutely lovely and actually went to the same university as me, although we hadn’t met due to the size of the year! The pastry buffet breakfast was a definite threat to my ability to stay awake but still a good start to the days.   
  
The bulk of our time was spent with lessons, in groups based on ability. They shuffled the groups a bit on the first day, and I think everyone ended up in quite a good group for them. I can’t fault the tutors, they all had different styles, but all the sessions were very involved, and I learned a lot. I was worried that my French would be too bad to get much out of it, but they adjusted the lessons to our group’s level and were very encouraging. An honourable mention does have to go to Anna’s traumatisme crânien Barbie, if I had to pick a favourite lesson it would have to be that one.   
  
I could go on for pages about the course, but I’ll finish with a mention of the best bit of it—the people I got to meet. There was huge range in careers and stages of life, but the group meshed really wll and I met a lot of wonderful, inspiring people I never would have met otherwise. Overall, it was a fabulous weekend which I feel so lucky to have been able to attend.

3. Report by Kato Herman, 6th year Student at Maastricht University, Netherlands.

Another wonderful Medical French Course in 2023 – *et je ne racontes pas des salades*!

This was the second time, but not the last, that I joined the Anglo-French Medical Society (AFMS) in Lille, and it was as helpful as I remember. I am a 6th year medical student from the Netherlands, and I study in Maastricht. This small Dutch town is located less than 10 kilometers from the borders of both Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, and Wallonia, its French counterpart. Most of my patients speak Dutch, German or, interestingly, Polish. However, I recently saw a young man from Liège with scoliosis and found it difficult to tell him to take off his shirt. That's when I realized that I needed another refresher course in French - practice makes perfect!

This course helps build a solid foundation in medical French that is easy to apply in clinical practice. I now feel confident taking (family) histories, asking questions about social habits and explaining basic maneuvers during the physical exam. The handbook unfortunately does not fit in my white coat, but my knowledge does – and I know what to say to the young Walloon with scoliosis: *déshabillez-vous et allongez-vous sur la table*. I have learned more specialized vocabulary too, such as *le frottis*, which I may soon forget but will certainly recognize if I ever come across it. Furthermore, I alsoknow what to say when taking a picture (dites '*ouistiti*'!)!

All the tutors were incredibly kind and managed to create a safe space to speak French, which is commendable. I felt comfortable making mistakes in groups and asking "stupid" questions, and my progress was noticeable. On the last day of the course, I spoke French almost exclusively with my fellow students. Each tutor also had their own style. Some preferred more active approaches, such as treating a Barbie who had fallen and hit her head, while others encouraged role playing between doctors and patients. In another group, I even played the role of a midwife caring for a woman in labor. Although I am unlikely to encounter a midwife in my current clinical placement, these scenarios were a lot of fun.

I appreciate the advice on how to work as a doctor in France (or Switzerland), as well as the many tips such as Linguee (French-English dictionary) and the book Anglais Médical by Mireille and Ellen Sweeney. These little recommendations made this weekend more than *just* a language course.

Thank you for the good company, the food, the workshops, the handbook and the walks around Lille. Both my feet and head may have been sore by the end of the course, but it was worth it. I would not classify myself as fluent in French...yet. Thank you for making me feel welcome as a Dutch student and I hope to enroll again in the future!