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## Report of International Exchange Traineeship

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BWS plus Network Nursing and Healthcare

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Ein Programm der



# REPORT OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE TRAINEESHIP

## About the exchange

In Finland, nursing studies include theoretical studies and practical trainings. During one semester, there are four to twelve weeks of practical training, and in the remaining time theoretical studies, which include simulations and lectures. Because of the way theoretical studies are organized in Finland, student exchange helps us comply with practical training requirements if we want to graduate at the planned time.

Project BWS+ Network Nursing and Healthcare gave us the opportunity to do a short-term practical training exchange. We had two practical trainings in two different German hospitals during our exchange of two months. During the exchange, we gained 12 European Credit Transfer System points. We also received 3 ECTS points for a student exchange orientation course, so total amount of points was 15 ECTS during our exchange.

Our international exchange started in the evening of 22<sup>nd</sup> of February as we arrived at Stuttgart. The next Monday we already started our first practical trainings in different hospitals, Sanna in Klinikum Esslingen and Kerttu at Olgahospital in Klinikum Stuttgart. The first weeks in a new place are always the hardest, and after two weeks of work, the practical training is already half way through. After four weeks, we switched the wards. We got warm welcoming in both wards and we made friends with other students during those 8 weeks in the hospitals. Even without us being fluent speakers of German, we did get along very well, had some good conversations with co-workers and learned much during our stay.

## Scope of work and main learning outcomes

For each practical training course, we had goals to achieve. Our practical trainings were nursing of children and youth and nursing of women. We had two and a half years of nursing studies behind



us, so basic nursing activities and clinical skills such as administering medication, measuring vitals of the patient, making infusions and the like, were something that was expected of us to already know. Both practical trainings were about learning how to treat children and women with gynecological diseases. We got to work as colleagues with other nurses on the wards. We were given responsibilities and learning opportunities.

## Pros and challenges

Choosing Stuttgart as our city for the practical training was partly because we knew that German people speak also English and Sanna had studied German before. Using the foreign language every day for two months made our English even better, and because we heard German eight hours a day, we learned German words of nursing and got to use them as we worked. It felt very nice to understand so much of the language and used it more than expected before.

Practicing abroad gave us an opportunity to familiarize with the policies used in Germany's health care system. This allowed us to compare existing policies in Finland and Germany. It also gave us the opportunity of reflective study. As an example, we had taken for granted the patient information systems used in Finland. We are used to report about patients in a computer. In Germany, most of the places they report everything on paper. This is not as safe, easy and reliable as electronic information systems. On the other hand, in Germany reporting is often faster, because you can do it while in a patient's room.

There were some challenges during practical training concerning differences between local students and us as exchange students. Finnish students do not get salary for practical training, and it is required that they have a support from their mentor continuously. German nursing students are working for the hospital while practicing. They are more considered personnel, so the students work often independently. These differences need to be discussed.



We had a great opportunity to live abroad. We learned a lot about taking care of daily business abroad. Stuttgart was a perfect city for us to live in. We got to see local culture and learned about it. The German culture is different, but it was not too strange for us, so we did not get home sick or had a cultural shock. The public transport is very functional and easy to use in Stuttgart, compared in our hometown in Finland, so we took a benefit of it.

## **Advice for future exchange students**

For students performing practical training abroad it would be good to learn the language spoken in the destination country. Nursing is working with the local people all the time, and it is important for the patient to understand and to be understood. In the practical training, the more you understand, the more you will receive from it. Have the courage to participate in different kinds of learning experiments. Practicing abroad requires initiative. In Germany the nurses are very busy all the time, so they might not have time to include you in every nursing situation. Be curious and active yourself, you will probably get to learn more. Put a little notebook in your pocket, you can write some important new words or sentences in it. It is also a nice memory to read after the exchange.

Prepare yourself for some possible challenges as well. Some days it might feel difficult to keep up with the different nursing and hospital culture. It is normal, but it does not feel like a big deal, if you are prepared for it. Familiarize yourself with the destination city; take all the benefits from it. Exchange might be once in a lifetime experience, do not waste it. Get to know the locals or other exchange students. It is very instructive to spend time with people from different countries and cultures. Moreover, the locals can give you great advice for what to do or see in your destination country.

