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Should I stay or should I go? - My Istanbul pre conference exchange

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Background: The Pre Conference Exchange Programme is an event promoted annually by the Vasco da Gama Movement (VdGM) which is a working group of WONCA directed to family medicine young doctors and residents. In October 2015, the exchange took place in Turkey where participants shared their experiences and beliefs.

Aim: Promote VdGM activities relevant to our personal and professional growth.

Discussion: When I first got accepted in the exchange I was very nervous. I have never travelled alone and this was my first exchange experience ever. A lot is going on in Turkey, the conflicts in the border with Syria, the refugee crisis and the unstable political issues. This created a lot of anxiety about my journey, specially on my family and friends. Before my departure the organisation joined all participants in a conversation and a few colleagues were having second thoughts about going. The turkish were very understanding but everyone else was so supportive and encouraging that I felt safe immediately. I visited a practice in Besiktas and participated in consultations. Even though I didn't spoke a word of turkish, I was almost certain of what patients were complaining based on their body language which was surprising. Despite our differences in family health unit buildings' and staff I was surprised how much clinically alike we are.

Conclusions: The Istanbul exchange was a milestone event in my life and a memorable experience so I am very happy I didn't let fear control me. I learn so much about the Turkish history, culture and health system and it is my belief that sharing your experience works like cleansing and, due to our demanding work and responsibility, you need that experience to become more motivated and successful.