

Once in a Lifetime

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The authors and the other members of the Society for Finnish Private Dermatologists went to visit the 21st World Congress of Dermatology” in Argentina. On the trip, named “Once in a Lifetime”, they also visited Chile.



One of the functions of the Society of Finnish Private Dermatologists is to arrange continuing education for its members by organizing study visits and fostering contacts with colleagues and associations abroad.

With this in mind, in the winter of 2006–2007, the members of the Society started to develop the idea of a visit to “The 21st World Congress of Dermatology” in Argentina; the theme of the congress was “Global dermatology for a globalized world”. We all agreed that South America was too far just to attend a week-long congress, so we decided to add another week in order to gain a practical feel for dermatology in South America. Our innovative treasurer Jukka named the project “Once in a Lifetime”.

After a week of lectures in Buenos Aires, we flew to the attractive wine town of Mendoza, which lies at the foot of the Andes. Before the trip, Jukka had been in contact with the local hospital’s senior physician of dermatology, Viviana Parra. Parra invited us to visit the Hospital L. C. Lagomaggiore, a public general hospital, where all the different specialities are represented. There are five dermatologists and nine assistant

doctors working in the department of dermatology. First, we had a general tour of the hospital, which was crowded with patients. The flood of patients was directed from the outpatient clinic to individual consultations, the laboratory, the X-ray rooms and the pharmacy using a queuing system. We then undertook a more detailed visit to the unit of dermatology where the patients seemed very much the same as in our hospitals. The various medical activities, such as laboratory testing, light therapies and surgery, were also very familiar to us.

After the tour, we met with the local physicians, who had prepared presentations about their work and research. When it was our turn, we presented our work and beautiful images of our country to the local audience. In the evening we were invited to a dinner party at our lovely host Viviana Parra’s home, where Viviana’s daughters served us a real Argentinean meal – a meat feast prepared on an open fire and served with a variety of garnishes. All accompanied by good wine, of course!

From Mendoza we continued on a minibus over the Andes to Santiago de Chile. During the trip, we stopped to look at the beautiful sights: Inca’s Bridge, Orcones lagoon, Aconcagua



Fig. 1. The public hospital in Mendoza.



Fig. 2. Gauchos in Mendoza.

– the highest peak in South America, ski slopes, an old-fashioned narrow railway... We were following the same route as the independence movement took when they marched to free the colonies from the Spanish.

The customs border between Argentina and Chile was located in the mountains at a height of 3200 m. While we were waiting in the customs hall to get through the very strict customs procedures, the thin air made many of us feel quite dizzy. However, after this necessary formality, we were able to continue and marvel at the breathtaking views as our bus zig-zagged down the steep slopes of the Andes on the Chilean side.

Our host in Santiago de Chile was Doctor Pedro Lobos in the private hospital Clinica Las Condes. This luxurious private hospital is well known across the whole of South America and people come there, for example, to give birth all the way from Peru! Our guide was the hospital's own public relations lady. The hospital building itself was very stylish and comfortable.



Fig. 3. Vineyards in Chile.

It was modern and spacious with wide, open corridors. There were no queues, just individual patients sitting here and there in armchairs. The reception, as well as the physicians' and nurses' rooms, was decorated with art. Consultation and operation rooms were equipped with the latest equipment and technology, as almost any current medical procedures and surgery can be performed at the hospital, including organ transplants. Special attention had been paid to the needs of the patients; for example in the children's ward, the door handles, light switches, paintings and railings were at child's height.

In the dermatology clinic, there was a ward with beds, allergy testing unit, every type of light equipment and seven laser therapy equipments and operation rooms. We were told that laser treatments were performed often, as aesthetic surgery is very popular in South America. The hospital tour ended with a meeting with colleagues from the hospital. Pedro Lobos told us about their laser treatments and presented photographs and case reports of his own patients. We, in turn, continued with our presentation "Un dia muy bastante regular", a day in the life of a Finnish private dermatologist, which sparked a vivid discussion in true Latin manner. The lively discussion continued in the evening when we enjoyed a good Chilean meal and wine with our local colleagues.

It was surprising and wonderful to see that, on the opposite side of the world, skin diseases, their treatment and research into them are principally the same as here in Finland. I am sure we will all be absorbing what we learned on this unique trip for a long time to come.



Fig. 4. Private Hospital in Santiago de Chile.