

Dr. Paolo SPATH report on Experience at Clinical Centre of Serbia, granted by ESVS International Travel Grant.

My name is Paolo Spath, and I'm a fourth year resident in Vascular Surgery at University of Bologna, Italy.

I would like to report here my personal experience as Vascular Surgeon in Training at the Clinical Centre of Serbia, lasted from March until June 2020 and made possible through the effort and support of the ESVS travel Grant.

It should have been a professional experience. It was a complete life experience, first of all.

As everyone of us, this experience I made in the city of Belgrade has been highly affected by the coronavirus crisis, lockdown, curfew and many changings in everyday life and therefore professional experiences.

Personally, after few weeks of training and working in Serbia, I experienced some symptoms (hopefully mild) and tested positive for COVID-19: at the end of the day, after isolation, hospitalization and long-time waiting, I spent 52 days of total isolation... but thankfully, I'm out and well recovered, now.

In this though time, I learned about new things, wonderful people, a city (Belgrade) and a nation (Serbia), completely unexpected and that entered my heart.

I have tied friendships that will remain forever, based on helping in difficult times before having fun in happy ones.

First of all, I would like to thank Prof. Lazar Davidovic for his help, support and human closeness, and all the staff of doctors and residents, for never making me feeling alone and always fully part of the group.

From a professional point of view, as soon the personal and general situation allowed to come back to a working routine, my personal experience as vascular surgeon in training has been outstanding: I took part in nearly one hundred operations, elective and urgent cases, during daily program and 24hrs duties as well.

It has been a pleasure and a real improving experience being 100% part of the staff, being always at disposal of the Vascular Surgery Unit, absorbing their way of working, general organization and surgical skills.

We treated several open surgery elective abdominal aortic aneurysms, in order to reach a complete understanding of the “open” approach, that still remains a valuable and often the unique option even in the era of “endo”: the aim is to develop a full modern future vascular surgeon, capable to choose, perform and handle the appropriate endovascular or traditional therapy, tailored on the patient’s specificity and needs.

Besides the treatment of the aorta, I managed to assist in some very challenging urgent cases, vascular traumas, carotid and peripheral surgeries and open thoraco-abdominal aortic repairs.

In the end, we put the basis for some interesting clinical researches and studies collaborations between our high volume Clinical University Centers and some interesting cases to be addressed as case reports.

There will not be a piece of me that will not be tied to Belgrade and Serbia and my desire from today will be to return, in happier times, and to better enjoy what this country and these beautiful people can offer; to spend productive time with my colleagues, some connections that we will keep for the next years, in order to develop both sides our vascular experience.

Finally, I would like to thank again the ESVS to have made possible this experience through the Educational Travel Grant. It represents an outstanding resource for young residents and fellows in vascular surgery in order to enlarge their experience, expertise and personal connections with colleagues, even in tough times likewise the ones we are living.

Dr. Paolo Spath