Improving Clinical Practice in Neurology

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Abstract

Neurology and neuropsychology is complex because it considers the intricate nature of human architecture as well as physiology and neurological pathways. Exploring ways of improving clinical practice in these areas is always welcomed; often experience of working in different cultures and in different financially dependent organisations provides valuable insight into how improvements may be made to the delivery of best clinical practice.

Introduction

I was delighted to be invited recently to Paris to exchange ideas and to forge research collaborations in Alzheimer’s disease. My visit to Université Nanterre Ouest La Défense, Paris, France, supported by the British Council Erasmus Travel Scholarship scheme, and to local French hospitals enabled me to make valuable links into this important area of research. My meetings with French colleagues gave me an understanding of the obstacles they faced in treating patients compared with our own in the British National Health Service (NHS). I met researchers who have developed a computerised package for helping carers of people with Alzheimer’s disease. It is hoped this will assist them to gain essential information about services, medication, and support and possibly alleviate some of the burden they experience in caring for a family member with the disease.

I am working on a similar system in Britain to be rolled out to carers and assistants in the NHS and community settings. This will complement my research and teaching at Bournemouth University.

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I think my first two minutes of unusually placed French nouns in elementary sentences may have gone unnoticed because of the vibrating microphone that worked inconsistently after it was handed to me by the Director of School.

A fleeting image flashed before me of a stand-up karaoke and then of a London market stall trader momentarily shouting out his wares, as the microphone snapped on and off. But it made me take a step back from the whole affair with a little light-heartedness and allowed me to relax and deliver the two-hour lecture with some enjoyment.

I have certainly developed a better understanding of cultural differences and, importantly, of health services and academia. Funding is probably as hard to obtain in the French health care system as it is in Britain, but funds do seem to be larger; and in the University, classes of students are bigger. The policy of liberté, égalité, fraternité is taken seriously with students gaining places onto psychology courses and remaining in study for up to five years before a decision is made with respect to their academic standard and whether or not they should graduate. Studying is hard in France when you have to remain motivated right up to your last year before knowing if you will gain any qualifications at all.

Certainly, this experience has been right for me and is at the right time in my career. I have many years’ experience in the NHS as Consultant, and in academia as Associate Professor and Visiting Professor. But it has been a joy to meet students and staff at all levels to gain an insight into studying in a culturally different country.

Despite being in egalitarian Europe, you know you have entered another country when the electric pylons start to look different - strikingly star-shaped in the field alongside the Eurostar train track. The welcoming pink tiled roofs and old-fashioned 18th and 19th century apartments just reinforce French-ness and evoke excitement of being somewhere different. The Parisienne quartiers give way to 1960s concrete and graffiti as you travel towards the well-worn North-western edge of the city, by-passing the new...
state-of-the-art architectural edifices of La Défense and reaching the huge campus that is Université Nanterre Ouest La Défense.

I did wonder by what means of transport President Sarkozy commuted to the University when he studied law at the prestigious Law Building. I doubted that he had the means or at his disposal the black limos and helicopters in those days.

One member of staff commented that the building was the only right-wing part of the campus though I remembered that part of being an ambassador from another country is never to get involved in another country's politics! So I commented on the intriguing architectural viewpoint which served as a successful diversion; and also outlined the merits of having two psychologically different University departments on campus – one firmly seated in cognitive and experimental psychology, and the other which unusually saluted the old traditions of psychoanalysis.

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