

Among Auroras and Classes: The 2025 Winter European School of Internal Medicine Experience

Entre Auroras e Aulas: A Experiência da Escola Europeia de Inverno de Medicina Interna 2025

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Abstract:

The 13th Winter European School of Internal Medicine (WESIM 2025), held in Björkliden, Sweden, brought together over 60 residents and specialists from across Europe for an enriching week of academic exchange and cultural immersion.

The Portuguese participants, Teresa Costa e Silva and Rita Novera de Sousa, selected by the Portuguese Society of Internal Medicine, reflect on their experience, alongside insights from Sara Lindberg, a member of the organizing committee.

Organized by the Swedish Society of Internal Medicine and the European Federation of Internal Medicine (EFIM), the event featured high-level lectures, hands-on workshops, and dynamic clinical case discussions. Participants explored a wide range of topics on Internal Medicine, from the broader humanistic aspects of medicine, to delving into complex and specialized subjects of rare diseases. The event provided a unique opportunity to deepen medical knowledge while learning from the diverse healthcare systems and practices across Europe. The clinical case discussions, in which teams presented cases from their home countries, highlighted the diversity of medical practices and approaches across Europe.

Beyond the scientific program, WESIM offered unforgettable experiences, including snowshoeing, ice bathing, and the chance to witness the Northern Lights. These activities fostered meaningful connections and friendships among attendees. WESIM 2025 was more than just an educational event; it was a transformative experience that will continue to shape the careers and perspectives of all those who participated.

Keywords: Europe; Internal Medicine/education; Internship and Residency.

Resumo:

A 13.^a Winter European School of Internal Medicine (WESIM

2025), realizada em Björkliden, Suécia, reuniu mais de 60 internos e especialistas de toda a Europa para uma semana enriquecedora de partilha académica e imersão cultural.

As participantes portuguesas, Teresa Costa e Silva e Rita Novera de Sousa, selecionadas pela Sociedade Portuguesa de Medicina Interna, refletem sobre a sua experiência, juntamente com perspetivas de Sara Lindberg, membro da comissão organizadora.

Organizado pela Sociedade Sueca de Medicina Interna e pela Federação Europeia de Medicina Interna (EFIM), o evento contou com palestras de alto nível, *workshops* práticos e dinâmicas discussões de casos clínicos. Os participantes exploraram uma vasta gama de temas em Medicina Interna, desde os aspetos mais humanísticos da prática médica até tópicos complexos e especializados de doenças raras. O evento proporcionou uma oportunidade única para aprofundar conhecimentos médicos, aprendendo simultaneamente com a diversidade de sistemas de saúde e práticas clínicas existentes na Europa. As discussões de casos clínicos, nas quais as equipas apresentaram casos dos seus países de origem, evidenciaram a diversidade de práticas e abordagens médicas no continente.

Para além do programa científico, a WESIM ofereceu experiências inesquecíveis, incluindo caminhadas na neve, banhos de gelo e a oportunidade de observar as auroras boreais. Estas atividades fomentaram ligações e amizades significativas entre os participantes. A WESIM 2025 foi mais do que um evento educativo; foi uma experiência transformadora que continuará a moldar as carreiras e perspetivas de todos os que nela participaram.

Palavras-chave: Europa; Medicina Interna/educação; Internato e Residência.

Introduction

Over 60 residents and specialists from across Europe, Israel, and Algeria embarked on an unforgettable journey to the Arctic Circle for the 13th Edition of the Winter European School of Internal Medicine (WESIM 2025), held in Björkliden, Sweden, from February 9th to 15th.

From the very start, it was clear this would be more than just a course — it was an experience of a lifetime. Coming from over 20 countries, we each brought a piece of our own world,

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yet, in the midst of snow and darkness, we forged something beautifully multicultural. Beneath the dancing auroras that graced the sky each night, the true magic unfolded in the moments we shared: the laughter, the challenges, the absolute joy of being there.

The European School of Internal Medicine (ESIM) was established in 1998 by Professor Jaime Merino, with support from the Spanish Society of Internal Medicine, aiming to provide high-quality continuous medical education for young internists across Europe. The inaugural Summer School took place annually in Alicante, Spain, from 1998 until 2006. Building upon this success, the European Federation of Internal Medicine (EFIM) introduced the Winter School in 2011, with the first session held in Saas-Fee, Switzerland. Each ESIM session, whether in summer or winter, spans approximately one week and offers a comprehensive program that combines lectures, workshops, and social activities, specifically tailored for residents and young specialists in internal medicine.¹ The curriculum is designed not only to enhance medical knowledge but also to foster cultural and professional exchanges among participants from various countries. To ensure diverse experiences and perspectives, EFIM designates a different member country to host the school every three years. For instance, the Swedish Society of Internal Medicine hosted the Winter School from 2023 to 2025. These rotational hosting duties underscore EFIM's commitment to providing a pan-European platform for education and collaboration among young internists - since its inception, the ESIM has welcomed nearly 1000 residents, many of whom now form the foundation of the expanding Young Internists network being fostered by the Federation across Europe.

The Experience on the Point of View of the Portuguese Participants

From Portugal, Teresa Costa e Silva and Rita Novera de Sousa were the fortunate participants selected by the Portuguese Society of Internal Medicine (SPMI) for the WESIM 2025. The national selection process, launched in the summer of 2024, was both competitive and rigorous. Applicants were required to submit a brief curriculum vitae, recommendation letters from their tutor and/or Head of Department, and an abstract of a clinical case in English, which would be eligible for presentation during the course. Eligibility criteria included active SPMI membership and being at least in the third year of Internal Medicine residency. The evaluation also considered academic achievements such as previous publications, involvement in SPMI activities (e.g., congresses, working groups), and whether the applicant had submitted for the scholarship in previous years.

From then on, it was a smooth ride all the way to Lapland. Smooth, but long — taking participants about 30 hours on average and several means of transportation. We chose to fly into Stockholm and continue north by a 17-hour overnight train, a decision that not only gave us the chance to marvel at

Sweden's winter landscapes but also allowed early connections with fellow participants, turning fellow travellers into familiar faces even before the official start of the course.

The scientific program at WESIM 2025² was as demanding as it was inspiring. We had the privilege of attending lectures by world-renowned internists, who brought expertise and insight on a wide range of topics. Some addressed the broader humanistic aspects of medicine — such as empathy in clinical practice, communication pitfalls, and medical errors — while others delved into complex and specialized subjects like toxicological syndromes, acid-base disturbances, and the diagnostic challenges of IgG4-related disease. Complementing these talks were hands-on and discussion-based workshops that covered scientific communication (ingeniously delivered as an acting class), clinical ultrasound, ethical dilemmas, and the healthcare work environment across Europe. The latter workshop, in particular, sparked a candid and enriching dialogue. Participants shared insights into the structural and cultural realities of their workplaces, with recurring themes such as the lack of structured feedback — whether positive or constructive — emerging as a shared challenge among many countries. This exchange not only highlighted our similarities despite systemic differences but also served as a starting point for reimagining better work cultures.

Among the highlights was the clinical case discussion series, where each national team presented a challenging case from their local practice. These discussions provided a fascinating window into the diversity of clinical reasoning, diagnostic tools, and resource availability across European healthcare systems. The unofficial disease of the course? Hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (HLH) — a topic that sparked endless debate and curiosity among attendees. The Portuguese team's own case [3] centred precisely on HLH — a proud contribution that fuelled some of the most memorable academic exchanges of the course.

Yet, our learning went far beyond medicine. We mastered the art of navigating icy paths between our cabins and the main lodge, engaged in strategic snowball fights, and stood in awe under the Arctic sky and silence — occasionally shattered by the screeching shouts of southern Europeans whenever the Northern lights made an appearance.

Björkliden itself was nothing short of magical, providing postcard-perfect landscapes and unforgettable moments: guided snowshoe excursions through the wilderness, afternoon ski lessons, ice bathing in a frozen lake, spirited karaoke nights, salsa classes, endless marathons of card games, and the privilege of witnessing the Northern Lights every single night of our stay in Lapland.

The Experience on the Point of View of the Organising Committee

For three years in a row, Sara Lindberg has been part of the organisation committee for the Winter School in Sweden. She



Figure 1: The Portuguese participants of the Winter European School of Internal Medicine 2025 (Rita, left, and Teresa, right), illuminated by their first sighting of the aurora borealis.

explains the school and the experience from an organizer's point of view: "The European Federation of Internal Medicine concept of Schools is made to make young internists all over Europe connect, not only through knowledge, but through discussing everyday problems in their clinics, ethical issues and sharing unique experiences. The amount of talent, intelligence, and knowledge in one room is striking. The social activities really add something to the scientific part of the course — the residents were comfortable with each other and discussions were open-minded and respectful. It is striking how very different the reality is even if we all live in Europe — working conditions, hierarchies, ethical decision-making, to name a few things. For me, the best part of the course is being there the moment somebody gets an idea that they want to bring home to their country. The real magic of the school however, is not about the knowledge; it is about the friendships being made and the love and compassion shared. In a world that is crumbling, such an experience really gives you hope for a better future. It is an honour to be a part of such an event, and possibly be a catalyst in helping people connect."

Conclusion

Some met on the long night train north, others upon stepping into the Arctic cold for the very first time. We arrived in Björkliden as strangers, connected only by a shared passion for Internal Medicine, but we left as part of something far greater: a vibrant community of young internists, enriched not only by knowledge, but by friendship, laughter, and a renewed sense of



Figure 2: The participants and Organising Committee of Winter European School of Internal Medicine 2025.

purpose. It's difficult to put into words the full extent of what we experienced — the learning, the connection, the magic of it all.

To any resident considering applying for future editions, we wholeheartedly encourage your participation. The next opportunity is approaching – please follow the forthcoming announcements of the next European Schools of Internal Medicine, and don't miss your opportunity to join fellow physicians for an undoubtedly remarkable experience. If WESIM has taught us anything, it is that these experiences shape not just our careers, but the way we see Medicine, and each other, forever. ■

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TCS, SL - Escrita e revisão do artigo

RNS - Concepção e escrita do artigo

Todos os autores aprovaram a versão final a ser publicada.

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