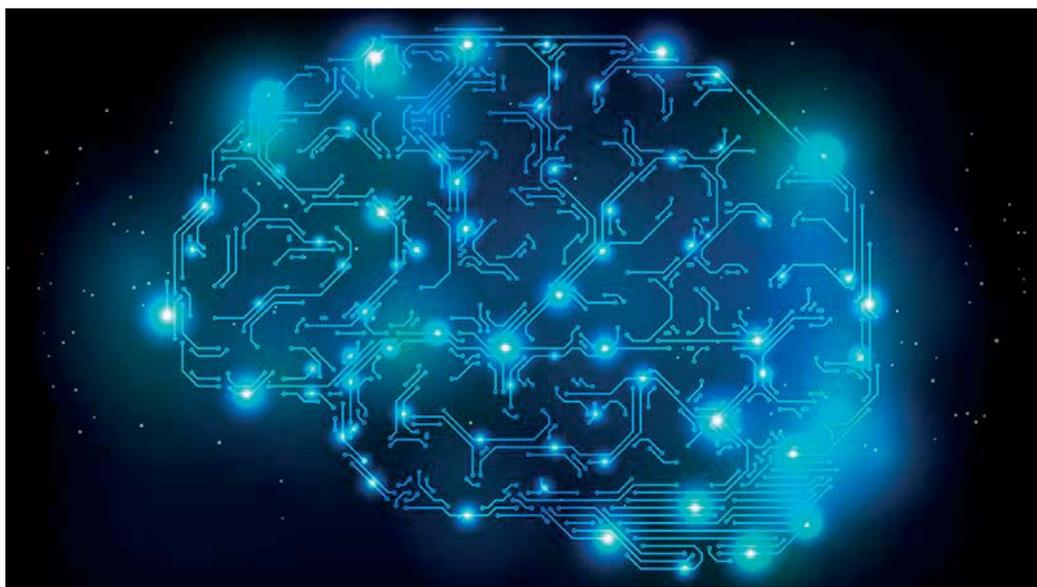




INTERNATIONAL Newsletter

University of Pécs • Medical School / Faculty of Pharmacy

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Impress

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PotePillars – the strategic plan of the UPMS

Written by Rita Schweier

PotePillars is the strategic plan of the Medical School in Pécs, which identifies and supports the directions for development in the coming years. Its four major pillars are the Learning Culture Concept, the Built Environment Concept, the Science and Innovation Concept, and the Well-Being Concept, which are organically connected to each other. The strategy emerging from the concept catalyses such a common way of thinking, a radically novel learning-teaching philosophy, interpretation of science, and human relations, along which the Medical School in Pécs not only follows the changes in higher education in the 21st century, but also leads the changing processes. We talked about the contents of the idea, the need for a new kind of approach and the practical elements of its implementation with dr. Miklós Nyitrai, the dean of our School.

- Why did the leadership of the School feel the need to create such a strategy?

- It is important to think about our future from time to time and figure out the next steps. Careful planning has conditions: such as the assessment of the current situation, which consists of an internal situation analysis, as well as the opinion of outsiders, and the formulation of future, realistically achievable goals. It is very important for the latter to follow a common approach, involving all the citizens of the School and incorporating their opinions. That was why the leader-



ship of the School said that we should put together a document, let it be an aspect that is not set in stone, on the contrary: it is intended to be thought-provoking, which on

the one hand inspires further ideas and on the other hand provides an opportunity for criticism as well. The point is that it generates dialogue and we are constantly incorporating the feedback we receive into our way of thinking. We believe that this strategy will become a truly School strategy this way, understandable and accepted, along common goals and visions, creating the collective commitment of School citizens. Everyone loves their own things, accepts them easier. Suffice it to think of when compulsory reading was assigned to us in primary school. A significant proportion of people did not like to read those because they were compulsory, even though those books were not worse than the others. In short, our motto could be: "Let's figure out our future and do it together!"

- Could this strategic way of thinking have been stimulated by the intention and necessity of competing with other domestic and foreign medical schools, as well as the investments started previously at the School?

- I think that the investments and developments can be considered rather as precedents. Development is continuous and we also need to induce it, and a comparison with universities that are considered competitors provides us with reference points. I would describe strategic thinking as a need coming from the inside, in the development of which examples are of course

important but our past is equally important because we have to build on our already existing values.

- Has the current pandemic situation and the necessary use of on-line education induced by it had an impact on the formulation of the strategy?

- The pandemic worked as a magnifying glass. It gave us an insight into the points in our systems with the strengthening of which we can improve. It has definitely had an impact to this extent, however, independently of the pandemic we had to think about our future, the directions for development.

- The achievement of what goals will the implementation of this large-scale strategy lead to in the coming months and years?

- It leads to the development of our systems - education, research, innovation, patient care - which are the bases of our activity. It also leads to the creation of a pleasant, inspiring work environment, which is the basis for quality work and will actually become a second home for us. It would be wonderful if people came to this School with joy and pride. The aim is also to show the realization of these to the outside world as well as to the university citizens.

- How big a team is working on the implementation of the four major pillars?

- For the time being, the first pillar, the Learning Culture Concept has been completed, currently the goal is to introduce and implement it at the School. In the first half of the year, we set up eight working groups as a start who, after analysing the elements of the teaching-learning system, made their development proposals related to these. After several months, all of this has become a whole and has evolved into a concept on which we would like to build the principles of our education.

The *Built Environment Concept* is not yet complete, it is a complex issue and it is about designing the spaces of collaboration. We are talking about learning, teaching, laboratory, and office work, as well as resting and relaxation spaces here. In its development, we rely on the university's chief architect and his team, as well as on a professional with whom we have been working on smaller tasks for a year and a half, and we have also involved an external company with a significant reference. In this case, the expertise of the School was no longer sufficient to elaborate all the details qualitatively.

The third pillar, the *Science and Innovation Concept* is in the middle of a serious discourse where our aim is to formulate forward-looking goals and associated tools in the field of science and innovation. The scientific performance of our School has doubled in the last five years. In terms of publica-

tions, things are going in the right direction, so this only needs to be addressed in a reinforcing way in the strategy. However, at today's modern universities, publication is only one important measure of the amount of scientific and innovation work that takes place in the workshops. We need to devote much more time, energy and attention to ensure that the ideas that emerge are also used socially, namely that everything we come up with in scientific laboratories benefits the population, the patients and the healthy. It has a financial side too, we would like to cooperate with the players in the economy, and if we formulate the goals and carry out the tasks well, it will also have the potential to generate revenue. The purpose of this pillar is not to provide advice on research topics, but to tell what is important to the School and the university, organized in a systematic way.

The fourth pillar, the *Well-Being Concept* answers the question of whether we are doing everything we can to feel good at the School, what the eating and sports opportunities, and mental health support are like, and where the current system needs to be improved. 50 to 60 people work in our health program, but basically hundreds are involved in the strategy-making process.

There is also an unmentioned pillar, this is the *marketing brand* building, which will be relevant if the four pillars are strengthened and achieve their goals. It is important

to show what we have achieved and to communicate this within the School as well as to the outside world. Presenting our values is important from a market point of view as well.

- I guess the results will be shown in steps, still, when would you like to see that much of the goals have been achieved?

- There are several points in this strategy that are already showing results after one, two, or three months, but it is also a heterogeneous idea in terms of its feasibility. All in all, I can say that it is a vision for ten years rather than one. A lot depends on how good the planning was. The good plan will be able to be implemented extremely effectively by the citizens currently working at the School, the teachers as well as the students or those working in the administration. That is why we are making our ideas more and more widely known to them, which we are constantly subjecting to critical analysis. If the individual goals are the same as the goals of the School, it will result in a different attitude, commitment, emotionally as well. The speed can also be accelerated this way.

- You have already presented this strategy to the leadership of the university, the teacher and administrative team, how was it received? What feedback did they give on it?

- Fortunately, we received positive feedback. There is some skepticism in connection with its feasibility and a little resistance regarding the change but it is a perfectly understandable feeling associated with the process. However, we need to move out of our comfort zone in order to move forward, to be able to renew. I can also say that it is a common dream that has its reality content. As time and developments progress, its limitations will also appear, which can encourage us to make changes and clarifications. The point is inspiration. This is when we say that if you want people to sail, do not build ships for them but show them how beautiful the ocean is.

If there are partial results, we will see the achievement of our work because our education will be better, our spaces, our environment will be more beautiful, it will then confirm the next step as positive feedback and that is very important. Success is a legal doping substance for all of us, which can even result in rapid development.

The video statement of Dean Dr. Miklós Nyitrai about PotePillars:



<https://youtu.be/04lx7GdWzUY>



STRATEGIC PROGRAMME OF UP MS

PotePillars is a strategic programme that adapts to challenges with its open systems and dynamic programmes. It can do so since it is built on our **values and credo**.

Our School is a citadel of education, research, and health care. We are building a special School with special people. Teachers, healing professionals, students, administrative staff are our partners in this. We are doing this in order to meet our social mission, namely, to fulfil the high, internationally recognized standards of medical education and to provide research with innovative thinkers. The

principles of "Learning, Healing & Development" guide us in the changing socio-economic conditions of the 21st century, building on the resources of our community, which is creativity, innovation, and commitment.

Mission Statement, UP MS 2020

EVERYONE IS A PARTNER!

Principles of implementation

- **the involvement and attraction of faculty communities is the most important for implementation**
- PotePillars is an all-encompassing, years-long strategy in the life of the faculty – a "MotherBrand"
- we pay extra attention to marketing and continuous communication towards the public opinion of the faculty and outsiders

What do we want?

- the formation of a new, shared, modern, successful and attainable view of the future
- commitment and responsibility in every dimension of our activities
- improvement of our competitiveness, successful marketing
- development of faculty community

Who do we want to involve?

Every student, educator and employee of the Medical School

What are we building on?

- the values and achievements of the past years
- the marked intention of the Dean's leadership and the support of implementation
- the demand for growth and development in faculty citizens
- the commitment, openness and eagerness of educators, students and administrative workers
- the community building force of common thinking and action
- convincing and organising power of inspiring and realistic goals
- the methodology used during implementation (by developing structures)



GOALS OF THE LEARNING CULTURE CONCEPT



- developing the complex, personalised learning culture at the faculty
- change of paradigms: switching from teaching culture to learning culture
- creating commitment via ensuring that every faculty member continuously "learns" from each other, promoting development
- support of new learning methodologies, providing students, educators and administrative workers with the opportunity to try these models



GOALS OF THE SCIENCE AND INNOVATION CONCEPT



- determining scientific goals and tools
- determining ranking goals, realities and tool (THE, SciVal)
- fostering, emphasizing and developing systems of innovation
- planning economic use, building business models
- integrating freelancer experts, market characters and new points of view



GOALS OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE CONCEPT



The concept and ongoing planning is looking to answer the following questions*:

- How will the faculty environment be better and liveable?
 - What environment should we be working, teaching, living in on the faculty?
 - What architecture views should be taken into account during the design of new developments?
 - How does infrastructure serve learning, matriculation and marketing?
 - How can we renovate our old buildings?
- * With the involvement of professionals, coordinated by UP architects, thinking and planning in accordance with the „Learning culture“ pillar



GOALS OF THE "WELL-BEING" CONCEPT



- developing the viewpoints, faculty goals and tools of health preservation
- determining goals of faculty sporting, surveying possibilities
- creating catering options, buffets, places to chat and sit (cafés)
- maintenance and development of highly professional mental hygiene needs
- integrating well-being, or renewal as a point of view into the life of the faculty.

Timeline of PotePillars implementation



INNOVATION

University of Pécs Department of Neurosurgery – a European Centre of Excellence

The University of Pécs Department of Neurosurgery is now classified as an outstanding European training institute for neurosurgery, exclusively in all Hungary. The selection of the UP department reflects the international standard of neurosurgery education, patient care and research in Pécs.

Berlin, Geneva, Liverpool and Milan are among the cities with world-renowned neurosurgery clinics together with whom the UP Department of Neurosurgery has been added to the network of European neurosurgery training centres of excellence with a €1 million financial support for raising the level of pan-European neurosurgeon training. Through the AENEID program, residents and postgraduate students will come to the Pécs department from all over the continent, and young neurosurgeons from Pécs will also promptly enter the international scientific circulation and will be guaranteed to learn from the best professionals and use state-of-the-art equipment.

“We can be especially proud of the fact that apart from Pécs, only one other institution from the Eastern European region, the Belgrade clinic has become part of the network; in postgraduate education they are going to be responsible for peripheral neurosurgery and UP MS for neurotraumatology. It is equally important that by becoming a training institute, our students will be included in this system and



will receive the highest quality training available in Europe”- says dr. András Bűki, head of the Department of Neurosurgery. The participation of Pécs in the network is the result of achievements of a long period of time, as the Pécs department has extensive international connections in the field of neurotraumatological research and treatment methods; its equipment can be considered especially modern even from a global perspective - including the neuromonitor system that allows real-time monitoring of the blood supply and temperature of the brain.

Furthermore, the department places great emphasis on training young specialists and specialist candidates of Pécs abroad and on establishing scientific partnerships

- underlines dr. Péter Tóth who is in charge of the local coordination. Of course, all this works the other way round as well, researchers and physicians from the partner institutions often visit Pécs.

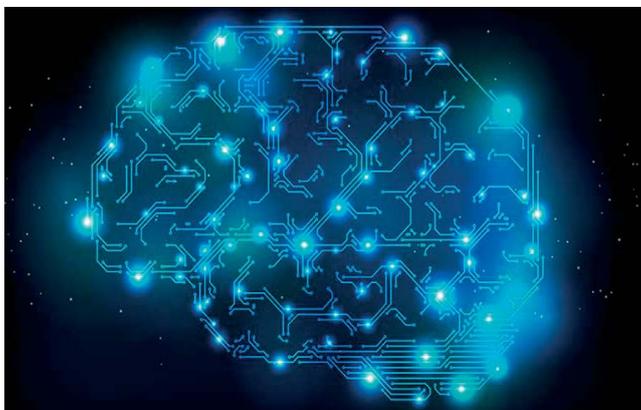
The first students and specialist candidates are expected to arrive in the spring of 2021, young doctors are going to spend two months in each centres of excellence responsible for a given certain field. Although in the opinion of András Bűki, the total support of one million euros can be said to be modest compared to the volume of the training program, the social capital gained through participation is invaluable both in terms of strengthening international relations and of training the upcoming generation of specialists.



INNOVATION

The patient asks, the chatbot answers – a health chatbot was created by Hungarian developers

A chatbot operated by artificial intelligence, developed jointly by the University of Pécs Medical School (UPMS) and IBM, can already pass a written examination in neuropsychology. It will not become a virtual doctor



that could fit into Star Trek just yet, but it will be an assistant that helps the doctor during complex surgical procedures or provides accurate and understandable health advice to lay people.

Nowadays, there is a good chance we are “talking” to a virtual assistant instead of a flesh-and-blood clerk, just as our questions online are not answered by people either. The often frustratingly stubborn, but rapidly „learning” machine helpers are present in more and more areas of life, and the researchers of the Medical School in Pécs together with the developers of IBM have now created a version that can answer complex health questions as well.

“In recent years, IT has reached the level of processing a particular body of knowledge with the help of artificial intelligence – in the same way as a customer service representative acquires the information needed to provide assistance. Moreover, these applications are already surprisingly capable of human-like communication, both in speaking and writing. The epidemiological situation earlier this year made a lot of personal interactions difficult or downright impossible,

making the need for such solutions even greater” – IBM’s Central and Eastern European data science and artificial intelligence architect, László Boa outlines the background.

To provide health information about the virus, IBM offered “Watson” – the AI assistant, originally developed for businesses, free of charge. “Watson technology” has previously demonstrated its skills in the popular American television quiz show, Jeopardy! as well, in which it defeated its human competitors in several rounds.

IBM and the University of Pécs have been cooperating for a long time in the field of various technologies aimed at natural language processing (NLP) also requiring high-level computational capacity. This cooperation gave rise to the concept of a chatbot that quickly turned out to be suitable not only for providing information in connection with the coronavirus but also for general health counselling and even for professional assistance.

Based on IBM’s Watson technology, researchers at UP MS Department of Behavioural Sciences have developed the central part of the system, which analyses and processes data with the help of “BERT”, a large-scale artificial intelligence model developed by Google that understands and processes natural language.

“The BERT model is, in fact, a framework capable of filtering and interpreting a given body of knowledge and formulating specific, short answers on the basis of this knowledge. For example, if we ask who Winston Churchill was, while processing the question, BERT will identify that it is about a person; it will search and scan the relevant Wikipedia article, and give the specific answer: a former British Prime Minister.” – explains Ádám Feldmann. As a professor teaching neuropsychology, Ádám Feldmann asked BERT questions from his own previous exam material, and to his great surprise, the model managed to pass the exam.

The team in Pécs focused on fine-tuning the basic BERT model, i.e. on its theme-specific development. As a result, they have come up with three different versions. The first one can answer coronavirus-specific questions, the second gives health advice intelligible to lay people. The third one is the “expert” model, which successfully passed the neuropsychology exam. In addition to the improvement of data processing capabilities, another big novelty of the development in Pécs is that the AI system with vast knowledge yet originally not designed for end users has become an application that can be used by virtually anyone. These three solutions are able to answer questions in English.

The result has become a confusingly human-like solution compared to traditional chatbots, which, when answering, adapts to the language style and proficiency of the person asking the question. For example, if we ask how to lose weight, we are told to lead a lifestyle where we burn more calories than we take in, and if we come up with a more challenging question about what causes Parkinson's disease, it informs us that although the etiology of the dreaded disease is still not fully clear, both genetic and environmental factors are likely to play a role in its development.

The spectrum can range from giving basic health information to answering a specialist's questions about definite steps during a complex surgical procedure, de-

pending on the situation so that the operation does not have to be interrupted. It can also be useful in education, if not as a tutor, but rather as a kind of teaching assistant in collecting and processing the material to be taught.

The chatbot is currently operating at the UP MS Department of Behavioural Sciences. According to its developers, *Ádám Feldmann* and *Róbert Hajdu*, an important future goal is to make it widely available for students and professors of UP so that the team can get as much feedback as possible and to fine-tune the system based on these reflections. All these can contribute to other novel applications of the chatbot, as its use can only be limited by the finiteness of human knowledge.



INNOVATION

An electronic observation chart system helps the work of the staff of the intensive care unit

Safer patient care, faster visits – an electronic observation chart system helps the work of the staff of the University of Pécs Department of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Therapy.

The unique E-observation chart contains all relevant information about the patient, including medication and prescribed medical examinations. Currently, in Hungary this system is only available in Pécs, at the UP, as the university's

colleagues have developed a parameterization package that fully complies with Hungarian customs. Thus, for example, it contains all medicinal products that are essential in Hungarian patient care.



EDUCATION

Hungarian Medical Association of America (HMAA) - Online Student Conference, 2020

HMAA-HC, the Hungary Chapter of the Hungarian Medical Association of America held its 14th annual conference on 28-29 August 2020 in Balatonfüred. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's event, was organized as an online hybrid conference coordinated from its usual venue. Although the much-expected student-professor water polo match had to be cancelled, the innovative scientific lectures could be conducted successfully online and had widespread resonance among their followers.

The scientific program of the conference consisted of basic science, clinical and e-poster sections. Participants came from Hungarian and foreign medical schools; members and leaders of the HMAA parent organization from the United States also joined the programs, thus the conference became an authentically international scientific platform.

The futuristic presentation of Dr. Zsolt Garami from Houston Methodist Hospital titled "Robot Invasion in the Operating Room" dealt with current use of robots in medicine and the lecture by Dr. George Baffy from Boston VA focused on meta-

bolic dysfunction-associated fatty liver disease (MAFLD) as one of the most insidious diseases of our time – being just two examples of the fascinating two-day program.

UP MS was represented by professors and students. Prof. Dr. Zsuzsanna Fűzesi coordinated a workshop titled "How to Save Medicine and Ourselves" providing useful advice to the present and future generations of physicians. Dr. Péter Kanizsai, Head of the Emergency Department of UP MS, gave an interactive presentation about his professional field, which was as great a success this time online, as it was last year with live audience.

UP MS is extremely proud of Bálint Lippai, graduate student of the faculty, who won the second section of clinical medicine and also the main prize as Best English Language Presenter. He reported on his animal model experiment at the Szentágothai Research Center and the Department of Otorhinolaryngology of the University of Pécs, in which he examined the regenerative effect of the peptide thymosin beta 4 on the tympanic membrane.

Previous participants of the HMAA exchange programme for rotational-year students talked about the life-long experience they gained. Although the pandemic has had a negative effect on the exchange programme this year, the association remains committed to sending Hungarian students to both Buffalo and Houston.

EDUCATION

Representing the Medical School of the University Pécs in the brochure of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

In 2019, the Hungarian office of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) launched a campaign to promote higher education in German language. The aim of the campaign is to show that it is possible to study in German language besides Germany and Austria as well. In Hungary for example, many higher education institutions offer university and college courses in German. As part of the campaign,

DAAD wanted to create an online brochure, in which they could present all German-language trainings in Hungary, in one brochure for both Hungarian and foreign interested parties. More than 16 Hungarian higher education institutions have joined the project.

The co-workers of the German Admissions and Student Service Office collected all the necessa-

ry information about the courses (General Medicine, Dentistry) of the UP MS and about Pécs such as: number of students, professors, application process, preparatory course, exchange programmes and cooperation projects. These were sent to the representatives of DAAD and they followed up with the editing and publishing of the brochure.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the project a bit, the brochure was successfully published in October 2020. The courses of the University Pécs Medical School are now advertised in both Hungarian and German on Facebook, Instagram and on the website of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).



<https://www.daad-hungary.org/hu/tovabbtanulas-es-kutatas-magyarorszagon/nemet-nyelvu-szakok-magyarorszagon/>

<https://www.daad-hungary.org/de/studieren-forschen-in-ungarn/deutschsprachige-studiengaenge-in-ungarn/>

EDUCATION

“Equivalence” Project at the Faculty of Pharmacy to facilitate the planning of study mobilities and to simplify credit transfer after mobilities

Students have the opportunity to participate in mobilities for study and traineeship within the framework of Erasmus+ Programme. Students can broaden their knowledge and experience common educational and professional practices in another member state of the European Union.

In case of a mobility for study, students take exams in the chosen country to complete their courses; after returning home, students can get these courses accepted by the University of Pécs. According to the usual procedure, this step takes place after the Erasmus mobility, without a definitely predictable outcome, making students uncertain regarding the necessity to repeat the academic year at their home institution. It can be a challenge for pharmacy students to review the curricula and courses offered by partner universities, to compare subject descriptions or to consult with course directors.



The aim of the Equivalence Project at the Faculty of Pharmacy is to develop a database – similar to the well-functioning table of equivalence of UP Faculty of Economics – in which courses of UP are compatible

with subjects that can be taken up at European partner universities. We compare curricula and course descriptions of the universities with our own course descriptions and based on the degree of equivalence we make a recommendation to students and the course directors regarding the acceptability of the given subject. If the recommendation is considered and accepted by the course director, outgoing students can be sure even befo-

re their mobility departure that a course successfully completed at the partner university would be also accepted as completed at home.

The equivalence database will soon be available at the Faculty of Pharmacy; it will help students applying for an Erasmus+ mobility decide which academic year / semester and which university to choose for their studies abroad.

EDUCATION

Looking over the rim of the bucket – or rather, the patendula Why is it worth becoming an Erasmus student?



The Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Pécs had an online Erasmus Mobility Day on 2 November 2020. The organizers (International Relations Office and Committee of the Faculty) put together the agenda so that students could get extensive information of the Programme, where first they were introduced general administrative procedures of study and traineeship mobilities by the Central Erasmus Office of UP.

Their presentation was followed by enthusiastic student reports representing the experience of Hungarian Erasmus students abroad. Ms. Annamária Vörös spent a semester in Regensburg, while Ms. Fatima Nmar took the advantage of being an Erasmus student in Bratislava. The Faculty puts much emphasis on hosting students from abroad, Ms. Maribel Noemí Benivades Gómez from the University of Valencia emphasized how excited she became when she got the opportunity to travel abroad and broaden her horizons physically and mentally.

On the Erasmus Mobility Day occasion students also got informed about the Equivalence project of the Faculty, which is meant to help students along the bureaucratic paths of credit transfer and to make it easier for them to choose a destination for their mobility.

All of the speakers highlighted the benefits of enrolling in an exchange program: besides making new friendships, getting to know new cultures, developing language skills, an Erasmus mobility is a Camino of self-understanding – a journey through which one becomes more openminded, tolerant, flexible and independent; which provide new viewpoints, new methods, new professional relationships; in course of which one needs to step out of a comfortable, well-known environment to look over the rim of the bucket – as one presenter described the Erasmus experience – or as a pharmacy student, rather over the rim of the Hungarian patendula.



EDUCATION

UPMS was represented on the EAIE Community Exchange

14–16 October 2020

Due to the global COVID-19 outbreak, the EAIE hosted its first-ever virtual Community Exchange in 2020. More than 1600 participants from 57 countries came together from homes and offices from around the globe to explore the theme 'Forging creative pathways'. Ms. Anett Tomózer, (head of office – International Relations Office UPMS) had the chance to listen to speakers from nearly 30 countries across Europe and the world. The EAIE Community Exchange programme spotlighted the most pressing issues in international education from a European perspective. One of the most urgent topics among international coordinators as we are entering the 2020–21 academic year is student mobility, together with some latest developments like Erasmus Without Papers. Participants were offered

to have timely conversations on new approaches to managing communication with mobile students in fast-changing situations or handling virtual mobility and virtual exchange in a rapidly changing digital world. The authentic interactions and the time colleagues dedicated of their busy work week to join online displayed that while there is still a lot of uncertainty in the world, our field is resilient and with the help of new creative solutions we will make it! The Medical School of University of Pécs together with our esteemed international university partners does its best to get prepared for the new era of mobilities.



STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The mandate of Jason Sparks of the UN Youth Delegation has been extended

Although the mandate of Jason Sparks of the UN Youth Delegation expired on 30 September 2020, due to the current pandemic situation it is to be extended till 31 December 2020.

The Permanent Mission of Hungary of the United Nations in New York requested that he will be able to represent Hungary again this year in the Third Committee of the 75th UN General Assembly. It has never happened before that the same person could speak in two consecutive years, but Jason's former speech was found so much relevant for this year that he was entrusted with the task again. He accepted the honourable invitation and his rhetoric can be interpreted as a continuation of his previous reasoning on the importance of prevention, vaccination, physical and mental health care.

As now already a graduate doctor, Dr. Jason Sparks encouraged young people, and the to take on



social roles, help the elderly, and called their attention to the importance of preventive behaviour.

Dr. Sparks gained enormous experience during his university years. He used to work for various organizations and institutions as a member, mentor and tutor, while he also participated in several international exchange programmes. At present, he is a PhD student and assistant professor at UP MS Department of Anatomy.

His speech is available at this link.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Surgery Practice in Fairyland: Medical Students in Hat Yai

Orsolya Homoki, Veronika Jakab, Gréta Navratyil, Jason Sparks

We had the opportunity to complete our compulsory 4th-year surgery practice in Hat Yai, Thailand thanks to an international exchange programme of UP. I am truly grateful that I was elected for this program, I would recommend trying it to everyone, as I gained lifelong memories and friendships together with the knowledge and improvement of surgical skills. **(Gréta)**

At the Department of Plastic Surgery, I took part in minor outpatient surgeries, mostly keloid removals, but I could also see plexiform neurofibromatosis for the first time in my life. At the Department of General Surgery I participated in open and laparoscopic surgeries of sigmoid colon cancers, where our professor gave us enthusiastic explanations and always let me scrub in, which was an honour to me, as it is not always a common practice for medical students in Thailand. **(Veronika)**

An enormous amount of malformations is treated at the Department of Cardiac Surgery, while in

Hungary, such operations are carried out only in Budapest. The interventions are performed by an absolutely familiar and routine team. I could scrub in and assist during an emergency operation right on my first day, this experience created a unique atmosphere for the two following weeks. **(Orsi)**



The most shocking experience was that we could observe patients with diseases that otherwise we could only learn about from textbooks. One such infectious disease was the so-called elephantiasis (filariasis lymphaticus), when the patient's legs are as swollen as those of an elephant as result of a lymphatic circulation disorder caused by a worm. **(Jason)**

We were extraordinarily lucky, hence besides gaining abundant theoretical and practical knowledge, at weekends we could travel to the most famous parts of the country. **(Gréta)**

We visited one of the hidden treasures of the Andaman Sea, the island of Koh Lipe. We spent the whole afternoon in the sea and finally waited for the sun going down at Sunset Beach, which – with no exaggeration – was one of the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen in my life. In the evening we watched the starry sky from the beach and the next day at dawn we started the day at Sunrise Beach waiting for the sun to come up. **(Veronika)**

During our trip to Chiang Rai, we visited the famous temples, all of which were different with meticulously elaborated details and breathtaking beauty. **(Jason)**

Before leaving for home, we travelled to Chiang Mai to an elephant sanctuary where we hiked with the

elephants, fed and bathed them, which they specifically enjoyed. **(Orsi)**



It was a great experience to try Thai massage with all its cracks and pains; all the extreme and spicy Thai food, even if it seemed double-hot and I didn't know what I was eating; smoothies made from tropical fruits that helped get through the 33-38 degree heat; and Thai boxing, which is a completely different martial art than I imagined. **(Jason)**

The little more than four weeks we spent in Thailand passed incredibly fast and we all would have stayed more from the depth of our hearts. Culture, gastronomy, beautiful landscapes, and the hospitality of Thai people is so impressive, one is not willing to leave this place. Thailand is a wonderful land, you have to explore once in a lifetime; this exchange programme is a great opportunity not only for professional development, but to learn about a new country and culture. **(Orsi)**



STUDENT EXPERIENCE

International Exchange Programmes of the UP MS Committee on International Affairs

The application period for international exchange programmes for the academic year 2021-2022 has started. 3rd, 4th and 5th year medical students have the chance to apply to exchange places at our partner institutions in the USA, Japan, Thailand, Russia, Germany and Slovakia. Compulsory summer practices and sixth-year rotations are available within the framework of these bilateral agreements and students have handed in dozens of application piles – this time only online – showing an optimistic attitude towards post-COVID-19 times, when all of us hope procedures can go back to normal.



STUDENT EXPERIENCE

An Unusual White Coat Ceremony at UP MS

Through this year's extraordinary circumstances and challenges, the EGSC was not sure if this year's White Coat Ceremony could even take place. But remembering the importance and celebration of moving on to the clinical part of one's studies, we wanted to make sure to still provide this special event while regarding everyone's safety.

Taking into account that the students' social circles are mostly within their respective seminar groups, we gave each seminar group a certain time frame on three diffe-

rent dates to pick up their white coats outside, in front of the medical school. We provided a hand sanitising station, volunteers to give over the white coats and picture backgrounds for the students to pose in front of.

Even though it was quite a different experience to the past White Coat Ceremonies, the students still enjoyed themselves and were very grateful that it could be organised in a way to still ensure everyone's safety.



STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The Peer Program

The idea of a peer support program came from the Hungarian Admissions and Student Service Office (HASSO) in 2019. As a 'front line' team they identified the need for an initiative, where students could turn to their fellow students for help. The decision to design such a group was also backed by the success of similar programs in other universities.

The recruitment process got started: a group of students from all three language programs was selected, a guide on a variety of topics (legal advice, contact of clinics, lists of doctors and other services) was provided for them after which marketing and advertisement commenced. Result: the Peer Program was born!

The team of the HASSO attended many workshops and trainings about peer support and organising/starting such programs, to bring in the know-how and to enhance the skills of our own team to ensure they have the ability to provide support to the Peers. The recruitment & selection process was fully run by the Hungarian, German and English Admissions and Student Service Offices.

The Hungarian program started with 9, the German with 7, and finally, the English program had 6 Peers in the first semester. For some reason, the demand for the project on the German program was not



where we would have liked it to be, however, the number of Hungarian and English Peers, increased after the first semester.

A website was also designed, where students could look at the topics each Peer was able to support them with and reach out to them directly.

Over the first year, we had a team building event with all Hungarian and English Peers taking part; the group went laser tagging, which boosted the morale significantly, and allowed the Peers from different programs to get to know each other. Both groups held open days

in front of the faculty library and took part in the 2020 Autumn orientation days as guides.

Then came the new academic year – 2020. After the first successful year of our popular Peer Program, we are proud to share that not only we did continue with it, but decided to boost this great project – building upon the past 12 months' experiences and feedback.

We saw dozens of gifted candidates ready to take on the role of Peers, supporting more and more of our students in need. We are starting this academic year with 43 Peers in total, broke down the 'walls' between the different language programs by allowing everyone to reach out to any Peers in 16 languages and included our School of Pharmacy in this initiative too! It is also great to welcome an increased number of German students in the Peer Team!

The help they will continue to provide the ones in need is very important and can also be crucial, as some of our students have travelled thousands of miles to start and attend our renowned education, which can be challenging... Settling into a new country, different culture,

where they don't necessarily know how to get around and who to reach out to or make friends etc., not to mention the language barriers they may experience at times. This 'extended support system' is designed to give peace of mind at a casual peer level – hence the name! This is to encourage everyone to reach out to their fellows when going through tough times.

Throughout the interviews we were amazed by the diversity of the candidates as well as the talent, strengths and assets they will bring to the table. We are very proud to have built such a strong Peer Team, who we will support, run workshops to, as well as catch up with on a regular basis!

Our mission with this enterprise is to make our students' lives easier, by opening up the lines of communication and support between them regardless of the types of challenges they come across, the language they speak and what major they study on! Why don't you check out our website and see for yourself how fabulous a program this is that we are so proud to shout to the world about!

<http://peer.medschool.pte.hu/en>

