Many thanks to the EUROSPINE Education Committee for awarding me a travelling scholarship this year. To further my expertise in spine surgery, I travelled to Madrid to spend time with Dr. Luis Álvarez Galovich, Fundación Jiménez Díaz, who I had met through meetings at EUROSPINE, and Dr. Francisco S Perez-Grueso, Hospital La Paz, who I had encountered through my research with the European Spinal Study Group. Madrid is a great city and well worth a visit.

Both hosts were exceptionally warm and made my visit meaningful. As I had sent notice ahead of my arrival, both teams were kind enough to ensure that interesting cases were booked for surgery the week that I was present. Once I had attempted to speak a little Spanish, the doctors were kind enough to embarrass me with how well they could speak English!

Dr. Perez-Grueso’s paediatric spinal deformity clinic had some of the most diverse spinal conditions that I have come across. Several of these patients were pre-operatively hospitalised and treated in halo traction before surgery as the team feel that this is a safe method of pre-operative spinal correction but also for plasticity of surrounding neurovascular structures. This was particularly relevant for a neurofibromatosis scoliosis that I was involved in, where on-table correction was easily achieved.

Dr. Álvarez Galovich discussed with me the forever-evolving algorithm for osteoporotic spinal deformity, a problem that is increasing in the developed world. We treated a thoracolumbar osteoporotic deformity (Kummel’s disease) with a shortening osteotomy and cement impregnated screws.
While I found the rare and exciting cases very interesting, seeing how common spinal pathology was treated in Madrid was of great benefit. In joining both teams for degenerative lumbar and cervical procedures, I picked up small operative technique tips and slightly different diagnostic perspectives on cases that would benefit my practice and that I can relay to my Irish colleagues.

Finally, I am most thankful for the opportunity to develop warm friendships with such experts and I hope to see them at the next EUROSPINE meeting!

Image 1: Myself, Dr. Perez-Grueso and his impressive collection of 3D 1:1 printed spinal models, with which he has used to plan complex spinal reconstruction over many years.
Image 2: Pre-op full spine radiograph of a patient who had a T11 osteoporotic compression fracture, with non-union (Kummel’s disease) and resultant deformity, and post-operative radiograph demonstrating posterior fixation, correction of the deformity with cement augmented pedicle screws (courtesy of Dr L Álvarez Galovich).