BOA Soli Lam Travelling Fellowship Award

2016 Fellowship Report



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Introduction to the Norman Capener Spinal Fellowship

Exeter's excellence in Trauma and Orthopaedic surgery is renowned. The Exeter Spinal Fellowship is named after the late Norman Capener, who was a Senior Orthopaedic Surgeon at the Princess Elizabeth Orthopaedic Hospital and Royal Devon and Exeter Orthopaedic Hospital from the 1930's to 1960's. He was a great leader in spinal surgery and pioneered the thinking and treatment of spondylolisthesis. He was an early proponent of anterior lumbar surgery. This Fellowship was created in his honour and is a fellowship dedicated to the advancements of the theory and practice of all aspects of spinal surgery, and is based at the Princess Elizabeth Orthopaedic Centre in Exeter.

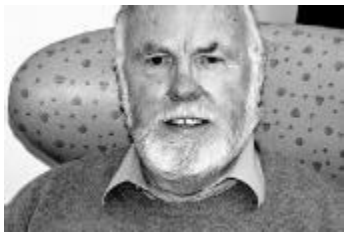

Fig 1. Norman Capener, a pioneer of anterior lumbar surgery.

The Fellowship is supervised by Mr. Daniel Chan, Mr. Andrew Clarke, Mr. Michael Hutton, Mr. Shahid Khan and Mr Oliver Stokes, all Consultant Orthopaedic Spinal Surgeons. The unit also includes five specialist physiotherapy practitioners which form part of the team.



Fig 2. The Exeter spinal unit is a team with 5 consultants and 5 specialist physiotherapy practitioners.

The Exeter Spinal Unit covers a wide catchment area and provides routine and complex spinal reconstruction surgery services to people in Devon and Cornwall. A full range of spinal disorder, ranging from degenerative pathologies through to tumour resection and reconstruction surgery in all regions of the spine (cervical, thoracic, thoracolumbar and lumbar), are treated. The only spinal surgeries that are

not performed at Exeter include intra-dural pathologies and primary spinal bone tumours.

Fellowship programme

The first 6 months is under the supervision of Mr Andrew Clarke and Mr Mike Hutton. The second 6 months is under the supervision of Mr Daniel Chan, Mr Shahid Khan and Mr Oliver Stokes. All on calls are done at the The Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital and only involve the fellow being involved in the treatment of spinal emergencies.

During my time I was instructed on the basic principles of evaluation and treatment of spinal patients. I also gained experience in spinal exposure posteriorly and, more importantly, anteriorly, in the tradition of Norman Capener.

I was exposed to a spinal deformity correction (either paediatric or adult) once a week, and gained experience in the use of the operating microscope and various neural decompression techniques including microsurgery of the spine.

How I heard about the Fellowship

The Exeter spine unit has trained multiple UK consultants, and so when I enquired about possible post-CCT specialist spinal fellowships to do after CCT, it wasn't hard to find people who recommended this one!

How I was awarded the Fellowship

I applied for this fellowship post through NHS jobs. Previously I had contacted Mr Chan and sent him my CV expressing my interest in the fellowship. Mr Chan was very approachable, and emailed me when the job advert was released on NHS jobs so I could apply. The fellowship program runs from August to August, and usually interviews are held in February time. There are usually between five and 15 applications per year, from which two people are selected.

Research

During the year you are expected to be involved in one research project. The aim should be to submit the project for presentation at the British Association of Spinal Surgeons (BASS) annual meeting. Mr Stokes has taken on the role of research lead and under his leadership has created a well-functioning academic unit. I ended up publishing six peer-reviewed papers during my time at Exeter team.

Personal Reflections

This fellowship was a great experience that allowed me to further develop skills in complex adult and paediatric spinal surgery. Particularly I improved my decompression skills, and confidence at performing independent spinal surgery. This fellowship has prepared me for my next post as a consultant spinal deformity surgeon in Middlesbrough. I thoroughly enjoyed the year and will remain forever grateful for the experience, and great friends with my supervisors.