

TWJ Short Fellowship to the Causse Ear Clinic

29th June – 7th July 2017

This June I was very fortunate to receive generous support from the Thomas Wickham-Jones (TWJ) Foundation to visit the renowned Causse Ear Clinic in Béziers on a short clinical fellowship. My 8-day stay began by attending the 19th international Causse otology course, which was led by both local and international faculty. It followed an informative 3-day programme of lectures and interactive discussion that covered primary and revision surgery for otosclerosis, ossicular reconstruction, advanced cholesteatoma, middle ear implants and BAHA. There was no hands-on dissection aspect to the course but surgery was skilfully demonstrated and transmitted live from the operating theatre. With experts from Australia, the USA, UK, France, Brazil, the Netherlands and South Africa it was refreshing to hear many different opinions during round-table discussions and draw knowledge from such an experienced international faculty.

The following week I received a warm welcome to observe in the operating theatre and get closer to the action. Here the patient was positioned directly underneath a ceiling-mounted microscope, with body rotated and head extended. This was so that the tympanic membrane and stapes footplate were horizontal and the ear canal vertical to enable gravity to aid placement of a prosthesis. A lockable speculum holder was used to facilitate a permeal approach with fully two-handed surgery and suction controlled via a foot pedal. A vein graft was harvested for every stapedotomy to seal the inner ear and reduce post-operative vertigo. The chorda tympani was released from its canal using a strong custom-made hook to minimise any injury - it was said this manoeuvre is crucial in the south of France where patients savour the taste of local food and wine. Damage to the chorda tympani may not be as noticeable in Britain, we were told! The stapedius tendon was divided with microscissors to prevent heat transfer to the facial nerve with a laser, and ossicular movement was checked after division of the incudo-stapedial joint to avoid missing malleus head fixation. Interestingly none of the cases I observed had facial nerve monitoring or a CT scan and the laser was used conservatively. Robert Vincent's economy of movement and attention to detail was second to none and observing him wrap a rubber band from a TORP around the cut stapedius tendon was awe-inspiring. Thibaud Dumon is one of the unsung masters at the clinic who I witnessed perform surgery on advanced cholesteatoma, with labyrinthine repair using perichondrium and bone paté followed by blind-sac closure. He also had many tips and tricks to share.

The hospital is privately owned and runs like a well-oiled machine. It sits on the banks of the Canal du Midi in a quiet village, close to the town of Béziers in the south of France. I was amazed how such a world-renowned institution has come to be in these serene surroundings. As one might expect for the south of France, the catering deserves its own review and it was customary to enjoy a glass or two of wine before returning to the operating theatre in the afternoon. We were treated to two formal dinners - one with a faculty magician and karaoke and another at the hospital owner's private château. During the days after the course and observership there was time to explore the Languedoc and Châteauneuf-du-Pape wine regions, lavender fields of Haute Provence, the Southern Alps and Pyrenees mountains, as well as beautiful beaches and historic towns.

The most impressive aspect of the observership was to see the seamless interaction between surgeon

and scrub staff, owing to continuity and long-standing relationships. The scrub nurse draped and prepared every patient and displayed a pure tone and speech audiogram for the surgeon's viewing. They had their own monitor to follow the operation and knew exactly what instrument was required before the surgeon asked. Without doubt the clinic's outstanding surgical outcomes are testament to what can be accomplished with attention to detail, striving for excellence, enthusiasm for teaching and good leadership. Since my return I have begun using their database software to log my cases and outcomes prospectively to assist with audit and improve my future results. I am confident that this extremely valuable experience will have a positive impact as I develop my practice and help improve the care I can deliver to patients.

Rhydian Harris