

Nijmegen Ear Surgery Course 6-10th February 2017

This course was universally recommended to me by senior otologists throughout my training and it was a great honour to be awarded the opportunity to attend along with a subsequent observership thanks to the generosity of the Thomas Wickham-Jones (TWJ) Foundation.

The course itself takes place in the Radboud university hospital in the beautiful Dutch town of Nijmegen and has been running for fifty-two years. As such the level of organisation is without compare despite the huge complexity. Under the stewardship of Professor Jef Mulder it is carefully choreographed to provide participants with a fascinating experience.

The course is five days encompassing the full remit of modern otological surgery and skull base. The structure is that of short lectures followed by live surgery before temporal bone dissection in the afternoon. The integration of these elements is a unique benefit of the course.

The live surgery itself was naturally a highlight. The experienced international and local faculty contribute greatly through surgical commentary as well as their active participation. For participants, the number and range of operations witnessed over the course is staggering! Mastoid obliteration, cochlear implants, bone anchored hearing aids, ossiculoplasties and middle ear implants to name but a few. This year for the first time, 3D TV was used with the operating microscope and this proved a great success offering a very immersive experience when the goggles were worn.

Lectures were delivered in such a way to take topics such as middle ear physiology and ossicular mechanics and provide real clinical relevance. On this occasion international faculty in attendance were Prof. Per Caje-Thomasen, Prof. Erwin Offeciers, Prof. Karl-Bernd Hüttenbrink, and Prof. Shakeel Saeed. The Brinkmann lecture was provided by Prof. Robert Vincent. He outlined his personal tips given his vast experience in stapes surgery and ossiculoplasty performed in Béziers, France with an incredible range of operative videos.

Catering was exceptional including local delicacies such croquettes and bitterballe to provide the fuel for a busy afternoon of drilling under the expert eye of the faculty. Participants were incredibly grateful for the ongoing hospitality shown by the Nijmegen team with evening events and entertainment an ongoing feature.

I was fortunate enough to attend for a subsequent observership, along with a fellow SpR (Juliet Meldrum). Much was to be gained by assessment of 'normal' practice in theatre and clinic environments where integrated information technology and innovation stood out. My UK trust has recently appointed a Dutch Chief Executive and I must say that my experience in the Netherlands suggested that this was a very sensible appointment indeed! Further surgeries were observed and I felt my time was an invaluable 'immersive experience' exposed to the full remit of tertiary level otology. Borrowing a bike, cycling with the team to dinner I was struck by the kindness and support we were given over the course of our stay.

I was hugely thankful for the experience and hope many more UK trainees in the future are afforded the opportunity to attend this incredible course and observership. It was a highlight in my training and I shall always wear my Nijmegen tie with pride!

Andy Hall