

## **Advanced Otology Course & Observation week, Nijmegen**

**5-9 & 12-16 February 2018**

In February 2018 I attended the Nijmegen Advanced Otology Course. It was a privilege to receive the support of the Thomas Wickham-Jones (TWJ) Foundation, enabling an extended visit, following the week of the 5-day course, for a one-week observership in the theatres and clinics at Radboud UMC.

The course is well-established (now in its 53rd year) and annually attracts eminent visiting faculty from across Europe. Held at the Radboud UMC, in the city of Nijmegen that is easily accessed from Amsterdam, it was also an opportunity for all participants to gain insights into a well-funded healthcare system and an efficiently run European tertiary otology centre.

The 5-day course programme was built around live surgical cases on most mornings, and three afternoon sessions in the temporal bone laboratory. The days were interspersed with interactive discussions, and short lectures addressing key otology and neurotology topics. Experiencing live surgery in 3D was unique; observing both the invited and local faculty tackling both challenging pathology and questioning (with all responses delivered in perfect English) during their live surgery sessions was one highlight. Despite an intensive and busy schedule, overseen by the course's director Jef Mulder, the style of the course encouraged engaging discussions between participants throughout each day. The morning's surgeries were discussed more informally at a 'meet the surgeon' session later in the day, and even the previous year's cases and their clinical and audiometric outcomes were critiqued.

Once the classic canal wall up versus canal wall down debate was concluded, it was refreshing to listen to the opinions and evidence-based practices from some of the leading European centres in otology. Notable topics tackled included mastoid obliteration and diffusion-weighted imaging, skull base surgery, tympanoplasty, revision surgeries and subtotal petrosectomy. For this year, the external faculty included Dr. Maurizio Falcioni, Prof. Per Cayé-Thomasen, Prof. Thomas Sommers, Prof. Karl-Bernd Hüttenbrink, and Prof. Shakeel Saeed. The insights into the varied practices across European centres provided tangible foundations on which I felt I could return to the final months of training – and my future career – with enthusiasm and fresh ideas for tackling a range of common and complex otology cases.

As a final-year specialist trainee, I found the course ideal for refining my surgical skills and clinical knowledge in a friendly and engaging setting. Active participation in discussions was encouraged. The course and subsequent observation week was an immersive and inspirational experience - the perfect preparation prior to starting a dedicated Neurotology fellowship this summer.

One highlight included the inspirational 35th W.F.B. Brinkman lecture delivered by Prof. Dr. Antje Aschendorff, visiting from University Medical Center of Freiburg, Germany. The topic was current and future developments in cochlear implants. This led to a fantastic

presentation with insights into the current research progress in the field, as well as an indication of future promises of hearing restoration. The evening was completed by a formal meal and further opportunities to speak with other delegates and faculty.

The observership week allowed a more personal experience. The local team were very welcoming and the practicalities of delivering evidence-based otology and the nuances of the surgical technique practised in Nijmegen could be more fully appreciated. The quality of the Dutch healthcare system, including the integrated use of information technology systems, could not go unnoticed by any visitor currently working in the NHS. Day case surgeries and a full range of general otology and cochlear implant surgeries were observed.

Personally, the variations in obliteration techniques for mastoid surgeries and hearing preservation techniques for cochlear implantation were more fully appreciated. Well-timed regular breaks between cases were taken to appreciate some excellent coffee as well as to allow everyone in the theatre complex to catch the latest livestream from the PyeongChang Winter Olympics (primarily the anticipated domination of the Dutch speed-skaters: the gold medal haul appeared to be added to on an hourly basis!).

I enjoyed the hospitality of the local team alongside fellow TWJ recipient, Anand Kasbekar (Otology Consultant, Nottingham). All discussions and lectures were conducted in English; the inadvertent use of 'Denglish' words was quickly and charismatically corrected by the local faculty. I am immensely grateful for the support from the TWJ Foundation that enabled attendance at the course and observership. I would thoroughly recommend the course to any senior trainee committed to otology: it proved to be a fantastic experience.

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