

CWJ Short Fellowship to the Jean Causse Clinique – July 2022

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The Clinique du Docteur Jean Causse is a world-renowned centre for otology, particularly with respect to stapes surgery and ossicular reconstruction. The clinic is hidden in the beautiful countryside and vineyards of the Occitaine region in the south of France just outside the medieval city of Béziers. Despite the secluded setting, the clinic is home to multiple eminent otological surgeons including the supervisor for the short fellowship Professor Robert Vincent. The respect that Professor Vincent's name commands relates to his unmatched experience of performing nearly 8,000 primary stapes surgeries and nearly 10,000 stapes surgeries overall and also his innovation in the design and production of middle ear prostheses that enhance surgical outcomes. Thus, when I was offered the opportunity via the Thomas Wickham-Jones Foundation to attend an observership and the 22nd International Otology course convened by the team at the Clinique, I leapt at the chance.

The short fellowship included 3 days of observing the surgical team at the Clinique followed by attending the 22nd International Otology Course. The course is open to otology trainees and practitioners from all countries and hosted approximately 40 delegates travelling from as far as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Australia. The international faculty is highly experienced and encourages open discussion and dialogue of cases, controversies and how different healthcare systems manage the same conditions. The programme for the course consists of a mixture of live surgeries performed by the Causse surgical team, lectures and panel discussions. The focus of the course is middle ear surgery (stapes, tympanoplasty and ossiculoplasty) but also includes discussion of and observation of cholesteatoma surgery techniques and reconstructive options.

Despite the considerable reputation of the Clinique, the first thing that strikes you when entering the building is the friendly and relaxed nature of the staff. Upon arrival I was collected by a member of the operating department and shown where to change and then where to meet the rest of the delegates for the pre-course observership and Professor Vincent. The pre-course delegation is a much smaller group than the full course, with approximately 10 attendees. This smaller group allows for the direct observation of surgery within theatre but is also aimed at encouraging educational discussion within the group in a more intimate setting. Prior to every case time was taken to explain the background, the proposed plan and its rationale and then a more open discussion to ask how a similar case would be managed in our home hospitals and to consider these differences. The atmosphere within the theatre itself is friendly but also informative with multiple members of the scrub team willing to show us the surgical sets and extra equipment which the otology team use.

Following each surgical case, we all discussed the techniques used and also again discussed as a group how our own practice is similar or different. This academic discussion between the delegates is strongly encouraged throughout the pre-course and the course itself. This also encourages a friendly atmosphere between the delegates that led to evening socialising and

friendly relationship-building, a secondary goal of the course that Professor Vincent made clear in his end-of-course speech.

Observing the Causse otology team was a privilege. The clear skill of the surgical and scrub team is evident, but rather than being a demonstration of excellence the operations are explained in a gentle step-by-step manner. Each operative step and the use of each instrument is also explained so as to highlight its importance to the overall operation and providing a rationale for less experienced operators. All the hints and tips are aimed at providing small marginal gains in operative technique and exposure so as to improve the chances of surgical success.

Some courses that include live surgeries are criticised for cherry-picking the operative cases so as to promote the operative team. This criticism cannot be levelled at the Causse Clinique course. Cases included difficult primary stapedotomy cases, cholesteatoma eroding into the lateral semicircular canal and into the vestibule, CSF leaks along with revision stapes cases. These cases were of great value to the delegates, as the operators were able to communicate their decision-making during the operation and then discuss the cases further as part of a round table session so as to explore other strategies that could be employed if they found themselves in similar situations in the future.

Both the pre-course and the course itself have been of great value to me. I found my time at the Clinique academically stimulating, the surgery inspiring, and the lectures and tutorials informative both at a theoretical and practical level. Certainly, I feel that my future practice has been greatly influenced by the experience. I would also add that perhaps the most valuable aspect of the pre-course was the opportunity to meet fellow surgeons from around the world and have interesting and thoughtful dialogue on topics of otology and wider healthcare. The faculty's encouragement to build on these relationships so as to produce the next generation of middle ear surgeons who can create their own courses and conferences was also inspirational. I already know that many of the pre-course attendees have continued to keep in contact with each other on social media and are already planning their next academic trips. The French national motto reads "Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité" and in a world that still contends with freedom and equality, it is a comforting thought to know that fraternity within the otological community can still flourish.

I would like to thank the Thomas Wickham-Jones Foundation for the opportunity to attend the Clinique du Docteur Jean Causse. I would also like to thank Professor Robert Vincent and all the other staff at the Clinique for making all the delegates feel so welcome and providing such a valuable training experience to us all. I would finally like to thank all the faculty on the 22nd International Otology Course for their teaching and training in the second half of the week: it was greatly appreciated, and I would certainly recommend this course to any of colleagues considering a career in otological surgery.