

CWJ Short Fellowship Report

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I had the privilege of being appointed to attend a two-week Short Fellowship at Radboud University Medical centre in Nijmegen. This was split between a week observing the team and attendance at the 56th Nijmegen ear surgery course.

Week one:

For four days I was immersed in the daily life at Radboud UMC, an amazing new hospital situated in the centre of Nijmegen. This high-tech building exceeds any expectations both with its aesthetic but also the pioneering work being performed. 8am marks the start of the morning meeting: with supervising consultants, acute clinical cases were discussed, juniors presented learning points from interesting cases and complications were presented. In these sessions we discussed simple conditions such as perichondritis, debating the role of antibiotics in trauma, and more complex cases including one of maxillary amleoblastoma discussing access, limitations and reconstruction. This was an amazing addition to the visit as I was able to see both similarities and differences in the management strategies chosen for common ENT scenarios and discuss best practice options. As handovers go, this was certainly the most educational and useful one I have witnessed.

After the meetings I was taken to the operating theatres, a high-tech environment with coffee on tap and its own canteen. The cases seen were a mix of adult and paediatric practice: some simple (myringoplasty) and some far more complex (third look mastoidectomy, subtotal petrosectomy and blind sac closure, cochlear implantation). I had the opportunity to join Jef Mulder, Thijs Jansen, Emmanuel Mylanus and Froukje Cals in theatre as well as meet with Professors Ronald Pennings and Dirk Kunst. This was a fantastic opportunity enabling detailed case discussions and sharing of pearls of wisdom which for me as a final year registrar were invaluable.

Week two:

The course itself was made up of 5 intensive days. Mornings involved lectures and live surgery and afternoons were spent in the dissection lab where each candidate had supervised dissection of two temporal bones. Lectures were presented on key topics from eminent surgeons sharing words of wisdom about a range of pathologies with a wide depth and breadth of topics covered.

Joining the local faculty were Thomas Somers, Maurizio Falcioni, Shakeel Saeed, Thomas Zahnert and Per Caye-Thomasen, resulting in experience shared from the Netherlands, UK, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Denmark. The live streamed surgery was a fantastic opportunity to see again multiple cases with the use of 3D glasses. We were able to ask questions of the consultants and professors in the teaching room; but also, through a live link, delegates were able to pose questions to the operating surgeons. Cases seen included combined approach mastoid surgery with obliteration, management of the dehiscent facial nerve and lateral canal, stapedotomy, Osia implantation, subtotal petrosectomy, ossiculoplasty and more. Overall, this was a fantastic opportunity to gain tips and certainly will enhance my surgical practice and help my approach to cholesteatoma management. In particular it was really interesting to learn of the obliteration techniques used commonly in Belgium and Nijmegen and the improved outcomes that are being identified as a result.

Following the course, dinners provided a great opportunity to meet with the surgeons and other delegates as well as the opportunity to attend the Brinkman lecture by Professor Catherine Birman who presented her experience with cochlear implantation and the research ongoing at present. It was really interesting to hear of the potential for gene therapy in helping nerve regeneration and I look forward to hearing the final study results.

Overall, the whole experience was fantastic with the entire hospital team and course faculty making us feel welcome. I made friends and contacts for life and would finally like to say a big thank-you to the Radboud UMC team and hope to see them again at future courses and conferences soon.