

## **TWJ Short Fellowship**

### **Antwerp Bony Obliteration Tympanoplasty Course, May 2023**

Thank you to all of the Trustees of the TWJ Foundation for enabling me to attend the 15<sup>th</sup> Antwerp Bony Obliteration Tympanoplasty (BOT) Course in May 2023. Whilst in my final month of training I found it to be an excellent time and opportunity to learn a new technique in cholesteatoma surgery and build on my current experience I have gained through my training.

The course was held at the European Institute for ORL at the Sint-Augustinus site, Antwerp, Belgium. It is a beautiful converted town house which hosts impressive facilities. The course comprised of a combination of short presentations, dissection and 3D observation of live surgery across three days. It was hosted by Professor Erwin Officiers and Dr Andrzej Zarowski. The invited speaker was Professor Angel Ramos who gave a fantastic talk on "Cochlear Implant conditions for a life time of hearing performance".

The faculty also included Dr Joost van Dinther from the Sint- Augustinus department and Dr Robert Jan Pauw and Dr Jerome Waterval both from the Netherlands and both being previous fellows at Sint-Augustinus. It was encouraging to hear how they spoke extremely highly of their time at Sint-Augustinus and have both built BOT into their own current practice.

There were eleven delegates from Hungary, Ukraine, Belgium and the Netherlands. The course was delivered in English. I found it interesting speaking to the other delegates and learning about both their Otology practice and training experiences locally.

The Sint-Augustinus department has published widely on their BOT outcomes. The team displayed their excellent long-term outcomes with much lower residual and recurrent rates of cholesteatoma than other published data sets. The theory of why recurrent and residual cholesteatoma occur was also discussed in depth which I found really aided my understanding in the development of the BOT technique.

The dissection took place in the department's state of the art skills lab. Each delegate got a fresh frozen head and were able to dissect both ears. Live surgery from the operating theatre was transmitted via their 3D television throughout the course. We often stopped to watch and be taken through important or challenging steps. Each microscope had a camera, allowing the delegate to take videos of their dissection. There was an excellent supply of equipment. Time allowed for not only practicing the BOT technique but also the M-oblique meatoplasty (a technique created by the Sint-Augustinus team), tympanomastoidectomy with obliteration, subtotal petrosectomy with blind sac closure techniques and ossiculoplasty that had been taught during the lectures.

A chisel and hammer were used to harvest bone chips from the mastoid cortex and a bone collector used for the bone paté harvest. We were taught to sculpt the bone chips to reconstruct the posterior canal as part of the BOT technique. There is a definite art and skill to shaping and positioning the bone chips securely whilst also making sure there are no gaps or irregularities. The team no longer perform any canal wall down operations, mainly due to the success of the BOT technique.

The team rely heavily on imaging, both cone- beam CT and non-EPI DWI MRI was standard for the majority of patients pre-operatively. There was an excellent and close relationship with their Radiologist, Jan Casselman. We received an excellent lecture on Radiology in cholestatoma. It was clear that Dr Casselman is key in supporting the surgical team both pre and post-operatively and he showed great passion and expertise in his field.

On multiple occasions Professor Officers highlighted how important it was to develop friendships within your field. It was clear how the whole of the multi-disciplinary team had good relations and worked well together. From Audiologists, Radiologists, Surgeons and the admin team people took great pride in their work and enjoyed each-others company. The surgical team at Sint-Augustinus have the same scrub team for all their procedures and rely heavily on them. Lunch was a time where we sampled delicious local cuisine and wine whilst also discussing difficult cases. It was a great opportunity to learn from perspectives and ideas of experienced otologists other than trainers within my deanery.

The course has also highlighted to me the importance of collecting your own results and figures for cholesteatoma surgery in a database. Dr Robert Jan Pauw discussed how he successfully embarked on introducing the BOT technique he had learnt on his fellowship at Sint Augustinus at his local department in the Netherlands. He discussed the difficulties and pitfalls to avoid when starting out. He also discussed the need for collecting your results to display the benefits of the BOT technique for both the patients and the department.

I found the course to be an excellent learning experience and I would highly recommend this course to senior trainees or new consultant with an interest in otology. I have learnt not only a new technique but also new theory in managing cholesteatomas. I look forward to developing this method into my own practice in the near future.

Clair Saxby