

TWJ REPORT: Auckland July 2022-July 2023

It is with great pleasure that I report on my time in Auckland, New Zealand. My sincere thanks to the TWJ foundation and its trustees for granting me this wonderful opportunity.

The fellowship covers all aspects of Otolaryngology, with healthy numbers of auditory implants and lateral skull base operations. Supervised by Michel Neeff, Tanja Jelacic, Hamish Sillars and Michelle Wong, I was given a multitude of opportunities to manage complex cases and receive impartation of surgical skills. It is a well-established Otolaryngology fellowship which runs yearly, with a TWJ fellow on alternate years.

The hospital is based mainly in Auckland City Hospital, which is the largest tertiary referral centre in New Zealand. Clinics and DSU are based at Greenlane Clinical Centre, cochlear implants at Gillies Hospital and there was a monthly skull base list at Ascot Hospital. There were also regular operating lists at the Paediatric unit, Starship Children's Hospital.

The rota runs on a four-week cycle with operating sessions varying between 5-8 sessions per week and clinic sessions varying between 1-4 per week. I had ample exposure to skull base surgery in the form of translabrynthine and middle cranial fossa approaches. Auditory implants including cochlear and BCI were also in abundant opportunity. Otolaryngological pathology was more severe compared to what I was exposed to in my training in South London. Socio-economic and anatomical differences and endemic disease profiles meant ear disease often presented late or in extremis. Widespread skull base osteomyelitis and intracranial complications of cholesteatoma were not unusual. Emergency Otolaryngological surgery was commonly performed, which greatly enhanced my surgical skills and confidence in the management of complex cases. The fellow undertakes some unsupervised lists and there is an expectation for registrar supervision. This allows a great opportunity for mentoring and becoming a surgical tutor. The fellow also has a good level of control of cases on operating lists, which I used to my advantage.

Theatres are modern and well-equipped, with excellent microscopes and instrument sets. Theatre nurses are well-trained and helpful. There is a dedicated Cardiac/ENT theatre level where out of hours ENT operating also occurs. Clinics are also well-stocked and clinic slots are adequate for a good assessment, while providing supervision to registrars. Morale is high at work, with the team priding themselves on doing good work with efficiency and rapport.

I found the healthcare system in New Zealand similar to the NHS. In general, it is publicly-funded. In addition to this, there is Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) which covers the costs for any injuries or accidents. Cochlear implants were publicly-funded but the surgeries were outsourced to a private provider at Gillies Hospital. BCIs were partially-funded for adults and fully-funded for children. What was quite different was that hearing aids were not funded for adults. A proportion of patients could not afford these and relied solely on surgical restoration of hearing.

Academically, there are opportunities for research and presentations. I had the pleasure of attending two conferences: the Australia & New Zealand Society of Paediatric ORL (ANZSPO), held in Queenstown, and the Asia Oceania ORL-HNS Conference (AOORLHNS) in Brisbane. There is an opportunity for the fellow to attend an advanced temporal bone course in Sydney. There is a temporal bone lab at Greenlane Clinical Centre and the hospital organises a yearly registrar temporal course which the fellow instructs on.

The cost of living in Auckland was comparable to that of London. Food costs and rental costs were high and the TWJ stipend will not be adequate for costs of living. This is something that should be considered, especially if travelling with dependents. There are opportunities for extra clinics and operating which provide another source of remuneration. A car is essential due to cross-site operating, sometimes covering 3 sites or more in a day. I often cycled around, but sometimes impeded by Auckland's wet and windy weather.

Outside of work, New Zealand is a fantastic place to live. Our family of four enjoyed the breath-taking northern beaches outside Auckland on the weekends and travelled extensively to all the best spots in the North and South islands. We did the Tongariro Alpine crossing where windspeeds of 70mph met us at the top and the mist cleared to the other-worldly beauty of the blue and emerald lakes and the red crater met us on the descent. In the South Island, Queenstown and the Milford Sounds offered stunning sceneries and we also enjoyed views of Mount Cook from helicopter. Tramping (hiking) is the national past-time and we certainly partook of that. The Abel Tasman trail was fantastic, broken up by stays at beautiful lodges on golden sand beaches. We visited the various wine regions, where imbibition was enjoyed in scenes of relaxed beauty.

In conclusion, the TWJ Otolaryngology fellowship in Auckland is a world-class fellowship. I have enhanced not only my clinical skills and confidence but have also been exposed to a different surgical philosophy and a different healthcare system, which has broadened my views as an ENT surgeon. I have made great friends and attained new surgical mentors, and I would not hesitate to recommend this fellowship to anyone.