

CWJ Short Fellowship Report
Radboud University Medical Centre, Nijmegen, Netherlands, May 2025
Miss Fenella Shelton
ENT Consultant, Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton

Introduction

In May 2025, I had the pleasure of visiting Nijmegen to attend the 58th Ear Surgery Course, preceded by a short observership. I am sincerely grateful to the TWJ Foundation for facilitating this invaluable opportunity, and to the ENT Department at Radboud University Medical Centre for their warm welcome and generous hospitality.

Week 1 – Observership

My four-and-a-half-day observership was with the ENT team at Radboud University Medical Centre, a newly built tertiary hospital in suburban Nijmegen. The department offers a comprehensive implant service and serves as the regional skull base centre, alongside general otology care. Each day began with an 08:00 departmental meeting attended by consultants and residents, where new admissions were discussed, often followed by short teaching sessions. Emergency admissions were limited, with few general ENT emergencies such as quinsy or tonsillitis, as referrals came only from other ENT services rather than the Emergency Department or community. This led to a caseload of more complex, specialised cases.

The team actively encouraged my participation in case-based discussions, and I was impressed by how smoothly sessions were translated into English, allowing full inclusion in the dialogue. Following the morning meetings, I attended a mix of outpatient clinics and surgeries, including skull base intake, otology intake, and follow-up clinics - valuable opportunities to explore diagnostic and management strategies.

In theatre, I joined Ronald Pennings, Thijs Jansen, Froukje Cals, Corinne Delsing, and Professor Dirk Kunst for both paediatric and adult cases. These included a revision combined approach tympanoplasty using the bony obliteration technique, middle fossa approach for CSF leak repair, sigmoid sinus resurfacing for pulsatile tinnitus, canalplasty, and stapedectomy. The calm, well-equipped theatre environment supported learning, with high-quality visual displays enhancing the experience. As a newly appointed consultant otologist, these sessions were instrumental in refining my understanding of surgical techniques and case management, and they will undoubtedly influence my future practice.

Observing a different healthcare system was particularly enlightening, offering fresh perspectives on patient pathways, departmental organisation, and clinical priorities. The contrasts with the NHS - especially in referral structures and case management - provided a broader context for evaluating and enhancing my own clinical approach.



Week 2 – The Course

The second week was the five-day Advanced Ear Surgery Course, featuring live surgeries, temporal bone dissection, expert lectures, and panel discussions. Lectures were delivered by local faculty and leading European surgeons, including Dr Saku Sinkkonen (Finland), Dr Thomas Somers (Belgium), Dr Thomas Zahnert (Germany), Mr Shakeel Saeed (UK), and Dr Maurizio Falcioni (Italy), covering a wide range of topics in depth.

Live surgeries were performed throughout the week and included stapedectomy, exploratory tympanoplasty, OSIA and cochlear implantation, and canalplasty. Several cholesteatoma cases were performed using the bony obliteration technique, widely practised in Nijmegen. This was a particular highlight, as it is a technique I have had limited exposure to during training. Having now observed it in detail, I am keen to explore its potential for implementation in my own practice, particularly for complex or recurrent cholesteatoma where long-term outcomes are key.

Delegates interacted with surgeons during procedures and discussed cases further in daily 'Meet the Surgeon' sessions. Observing a variety of surgical approaches will significantly influence my NHS practice, especially in managing cholesteatoma and hearing restoration.

The course also included five supervised temporal bone lab sessions, with two bones per delegate. A new addition this year was an endoscopic ear surgery session, further broadening the learning experience. Industry representatives supported the labs, offering the chance to trial new and alternative implants and prostheses.

Evening events included organised dinners and the prestigious Brinkman Lecture, delivered by Professor Sébastien Schmerber (France). These provided excellent opportunities to network with faculty, fellow delegates, and reconnect with colleagues from previous international fellowships. We were fortunate to enjoy exceptional spring weather, allowing time to explore Nijmegen and nearby Dutch cities during the evenings and weekend.

Conclusion

This two-week fellowship in Nijmegen has been an excellent experience, enhancing my technical skills, clinical reasoning, and professional network. The combination of the observership and advanced ear surgery course provided a unique opportunity to immerse myself in a high-performing ENT department, observe a wide range of complex procedures, and engage in structured educational activities.

I am deeply grateful to the TWJ Foundation for supporting this opportunity, and to the faculty and staff at Radboud University Medical Centre for their warm hospitality and commitment to delivering an outstanding educational experience. I have made numerous professional connections and look forward to future collaborations and events.

