

TWJ Short Fellowship Report 2026

26th International Otology Course, Clinique Jean Causse, Colombiers

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I was delighted to be awarded a TWJ Foundation Short Fellowship to attend the 26th International Otology Course at the Clinique Jean Causse in Colombiers, along with a short observership beforehand. As a final year otology trainee with a longstanding interest in lateral skull base, neurotological and middle ear surgery, this was a genuine chance to learn from a clinic with an international reputation few others can match. The timing suited me well too, coming shortly before I start subspecialty fellowship training, and gave me a good stretch of time to focus purely on operative judgement, technical discipline and how a busy otology unit actually runs day to day.

The days before the course were dominated by watching Dr Robert Vincent operate. His command of stapes surgery is the product of decades of practice, but he explained it plainly and practically, case by case, rather than leaving us to guess at what he was doing and why. Many of the most useful lessons were small details, easy to dismiss until you have seen them repeated by someone who has done thousands of these ears: positioning the patient so the footplate sits horizontal, using a vein graft over the oval window, and small adjustments in hand position, prosthesis placement and tissue handling that separate a good result from an excellent one. Watching him move between primary and revision cases without missing a beat, troubleshooting each ear as it came up, was worth the trip in itself.

Just as impressive was the theatre around him. The scrub nurses worked with a precision that only comes from years alongside the same surgeons, instruments appearing before they were asked for, quick turnover between cases, and barely a wasted movement from anaesthetic, surgical or nursing staff all day. It was a good lesson in how much smoother and safer a list runs when everyone in the room knows the operation, the surgeon and the rhythm of the day. I came home thinking hard about what I could actually take back to my own theatre.

I was also lucky to see Dr Thibaud Dumon and Dr Venail take on some genuinely complex revision cases, including difficult revision mastoid surgery and ossiculoplasty. What made these cases so useful was their willingness to talk through their decision-making as they went, rather than just getting on with it. Their approach to reconstruction, checking the membrane, mucosa, ossicular remnants and Eustachian tube function before deciding how ambitious to be, was a good reminder that otology is as much about choosing the right operation for the ear in front of you as it is about performing it well.



The observership before the course also brought together a small international group of surgeons at different stages of their careers, including colleagues from India, Brazil, Portugal, Spain and Azerbaijan. Comparing notes on how we each approach the same problems, and how our health systems are set up, was one of the real pleasures of the week. Conversations that started in the theatre corridor usually carried on over dinner, and I came away with a much broader sense of how otology is taught and practised outside Ireland and the UK.

The course proper brought a much bigger international faculty together, with live surgery broadcast to the auditorium and discussion running through every session. It worked well because technical points could be picked up immediately, with everyone able to see the anatomy, the difficulty and the fix in real time. Having experts from all over the world debate technique, and occasionally disagree with each other, was a useful reminder that there is rarely only one right way to solve a difficult ear. What stayed constant across all of them was respect for tissue, careful exposure, sensible prosthesis choice and a clear plan for dealing with complications.

The social side of the week matched the academic programme. The course dinner, held in a nearby château, was a real highlight, with excellent food, wine and dancing long into the night. Evenings were spent exploring some of Béziers' best restaurants with the other delegates, and those informal moments mattered just as much, building friendships and connections I hope will last well beyond the course itself.

Béziers was a great base for the week. The town has a rich history, and its medieval streets, churches and squares are well worth exploring in the time around the course. Having the Clinique Jean Causse just outside town gave the week a nice rhythm too, focused and surgical during the day, relaxed and sociable in the evenings.

I am extremely grateful to the TWJ Foundation for making this trip possible, and to Dr Vincent, Dr Dumon, Dr Venail and the wider faculty and theatre team for their generosity in teaching. The fellowship sharpened my understanding of stapes surgery, ossiculoplasty and revision otology, and it reminded me just how much preparation, theatre efficiency and humility matter in getting good results. I would not hesitate to recommend both the course and the observership beforehand to any otology trainee looking to refine their middle ear practice and see how things are done elsewhere.