

TWJ Clinical Fellowship in Otology/Neurotology Report

University Health Network, Toronto

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I wish to thank the Trustees of the Thomas Wickham-Jones (TWJ) Foundation for the TWJ Fellowship in Otology/Neurotology working under the supervision of Dr John Alexander Rutka. I was last in the line of TWJ Fellows under the mentorship of Dr Rutka and the value he places on his Fellows is demonstrated by the Fellow's room, which contains a photograph of every single Fellow he has had, several of whom are current Irish consultants.

The Fellowship was centred in Toronto but over the year I travelled both near, far and even farther to gain more insights into the craft of our speciality, from Niagara Falls to Dryden and even to Oman. It was a wide-ranging experience with new experiences and adventures. Dr Rutka's knowledge was matched by his generosity for his Fellows and his sense of adventure.

My time in the University Health Network included working as part of a very large multidisciplinary team consisting of specialists I had rarely had the opportunity to work with before such as a vestibular psychiatrist, vestibular neurologist and a neuro-ophthalmologist. This demonstrated a new approach to patient care I had not encountered before which proved very interesting. This award-winning "Hertz Multidisciplinary Neurotology Clinic" assessed and managed the most complex patients with vestibular dysfunction, some of whom were post-concussion. While working in TGH I was also awarded a grant to further investigate the utility of a large language model in the assessment of vestibular patients.

While in Toronto I was involved in cases which included canal occlusion surgery, surgery for superior canal dehiscence syndrome and refractory posterior semi-circular canal BPPV. These patients in the post-operative phase were often the most satisfied by surgery that I had seen over the year.

In addition, Dr Rutka specialises in complex lateral skull base and complex/revision surgery. His surgical skills are exemplary matched by his teaching approach while in the OR. I learned his approach to meatoplasty, called the Toronto Meatoplasty (which is published) and approaches to total tympanic membrane perforation including the use of split-thickness skin grafts. While in Toronto joint cases with neurosurgery to approach the cerebellopontine angle occurred on a monthly basis. These were very interesting days which involved extensive drilling of the lateral temporal bone using the translabyrinthine approach.

One of the highlights of the year was a trip to Oman to participate in an infratemporal fossa dissection course. This was a 3-day course which included faculty from all over the world. The trip also included some time to explore the interior of Oman and the coastal town of Mussandam, where we buckled up to go down the world's longest zip line over water.

One of the other highlights was outreach work to a town 1600km from Toronto in Dryden. These weeks were always interesting and busy. I was impressed by the dedication of the staff there, which included family medicine general practitioners who also worked as anaesthetists.

We also had the opportunity to go dog sledding over several ice-covered lakes, eat some moose stew and travel through forests with a local trapper during our winter trip there.

In addition to the learning opportunities, I made some great friends and had incredible times adventuring around Canada; from multi-day canoe trips with portaging, to living 50 floors up in the Toronto skyline, to becoming a father. My time in Toronto was both career- and life-changing. Lastly I would like to thank Dr Rutka, his team and his wife for their kindness and hospitality over the year.