

EFORT Spring Travelling Fellowship Germany 15-21 May 2011

The EFORT Spring Travelling Fellowship 2011 was held in Germany. I was one of the 14 trainees to attend, each one of us selected by and representing our country's national orthopaedic and trauma association. The scientific programme took place over 6 days in four cities in Germany: Dresden, Berlin, Erlangen and Bonn. It was an interesting and positive experience, and I am grateful to the people involved in the organization of the fellowship, as well as to the Association of Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgeons of Malta for having given me such an opportunity.

Dresden 15th May

On arriving to Dresden, we met in the hotel lobby, and we were accompanied by Prof Günther and Dr Mettelsiefen on a bicycle ride that would lead us to the restaurant where we were to have our welcome dinner. The bicycle tour was a most original and interesting way to start the fellowship, not only because it gave us plenty of time to introduce ourselves to each other in a relaxed manner, but also because the bicycle ride in itself was set in a beautiful location, along the scenic river Elbe. We passed by the hospital and along several historical castles. We eventually made our way into Dresden city centre, where we saw the newly built-up square and St Mary's cathedral, and we had dinner at the 'Augustiner'. This was the official welcome dinner, during which we all introduced ourselves and some of us were given to opportunity to give a brief introductory presentation.

16th May

This was a day spent at the hospital Universitätsklinikum Carl Gustav Carus. The morning sessions were dedicated to current trends in knee surgery. Specifically, we were given lectures followed by discussions, on high tibial osteotomies, total knee arthroplasty and navigation systems. In the afternoon we were split into groups and some of us attended theatre, whereas others had saw bone sessions using navigation systems. We then had a session on Achilles tendon rupture and foot trauma. This included a video seminar on Achilles tendon percutaneous repair and calcaneal fracture treatment, and was followed by discussions.

We then had a guided historic tour of Dresden inner city that took us back through several decades in time. We could visualize the transformation of the ruins of Dresden into the beautiful city that it is at present. We had a dinner at 'Schillergarten' along and overlooking the river Elbe, and some of us gave an introductory presentation.

Berlin 17th May

During the bus transfer to Berlin we were given presentations and there was plenty of time for discussions, and on arrival we were taken to the Charite hospital (Zentrum Muskuloskeletale Chirurgie Charite). We were given an introduction to the polytrauma care in Berlin, and specifically at the Charite. We all had an opportunity to see live trauma surgery in this large trauma centre. I saw a LISS plating of the tibia, and ORIF of a pilon fracture. This was followed by a lecture on fractures of the pelvic ring and acetabulum – timing, approaches and reconstructive principles. Following the lectures we were given the opportunity to insert a proximal femoral nail and apply pelvic C-clamp on saw bones. Following an intensive day at the very busy and efficient 3rd level centre, we met the members of the faculty for dinner at '12 Apostel'. Afterwards we ended the Berlin

experience by walking around the city, visiting the Berlin Gate and even entering the spectacular Parliament.

Erlangen

18th May

We had a bus transfer to Erlangen and visited a private clinic, with a guided tour to its interior. We were given a lecture on the current trends and economic factors in orthopaedics and trauma, highlighting the national differences in different European countries.

We were then taken to the impressive SIEMENS MRI factory. The principles of MRI and new developments in MRI of the musculoskeletal system were explained. We were shown the interior of the factory and the steps of the manufacturing process.

We were transferred to our hotel in Erlangen, and met soon after for a tour of the historic centre, guided by a 'nightwatch' guide. We had a typical Frankonian dinner at one of Erlangen's oldest brewery 'Steinbach' Beer garden, and eventually walked back through the old town streets to our hotel.

19th May

In the morning we were given a warm welcome by Prof Kladny at 'Fachklinik Herzogenaurach', an excellent rehabilitation hospital. We had presentations and discussions about current rehabilitation systems in European countries, and we were given a tour of the centre. We then had presentations and workshops on low back pain, and physiotherapy exercises were demonstrated and tried! This was followed by a lunch (a lavish one for a hospital canteen!), just before the bus transfer to Bonn, the final city we were to visit during our stay in Germany.

Bonn

We arrived in Bonn and during the dinner we were introduced to Prof Wirtz and his team who were to take us through the last part of the travelling fellowship.

20th May

We attended the trauma meeting at the 'Universitätsklinikum' and were given lectures on primary hip arthroplasty: which implants to use in particular situations, on revision hip arthroplasty and on management of prosthetic infections. We were shown the hospital, including the theatre, wards, and research centre. Workshops on sawbones were organized. The scientific sessions ended in the afternoon with presentations and discussions on spine surgery, including management of osteoporotic fractures, and the effect of cement viscosity in vertebroplasty/kyphoplasty.

We all met for the last social event of the travelling fellowship: We went to a beer garden along the river Rhine and then had a pleasant walk around the centre of Bonn where we met with the faculty members for the farewell dinner. We thanked Prof Wirtz for his hospitality. Being the last night of the fellowship we bade farewell to each other, as we were to leave the next day.

In Summary...

Overall the EFORT Spring Travelling Fellowship was a very positive experience. It gave me the opportunity to meet fellow trainees from different European countries and it was interesting to learn about the training setups in the different countries, each with its set of advantages and disadvantages. It gave us a good insight into the German working dynamics and the opportunity to meet specialists and trainees working in the various hospitals that we visited. The bus transfers and social events gave us plenty of time to chat

and get to know one another and by the end of the fellowship we were a very compatible group. It was good fun besides being informative.

I would recommend the EFORT Travelling Fellowship to other trainees as it is an enriching experience. I hope to meet up with the fellows from the group, possibly in Berlin again at the 13th EFORT congress.

I sincerely would like to thank the Association of Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgeons of Malta, Prof Klaus-Peter Günther and Dr Jan Mettelsiefen on behalf of the organizing Societies BVOU and DGOOC, Ms Reimer for the practical arrangements, and the host surgeons and trainees.

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