

Report - EFORT Travelling Fellowship

Belgium
21 - 27 April 2013

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Introduction

I was delighted to be informed that I had been selected to represent the UK for the Spring travelling fellowship to Belgium in 2013. I have always been interested to compare how orthopaedic care is delivered in other countries and this trip provided me with my first experience of this. Travelling from Newcastle to Belgium turned out to be very straightforward by taking a train to Kings Cross and popping across the road to St Pancras to get the Eurostar to Brussels. After arrival at the hotel I was given directions to go for dinner with the two presidents of the French and Flemish orthopaedic associations, Prof Schuind and Dr Van Den Dalen respectively. At this dinner we met with most of the travelling fellows and it was certainly an excellent introduction to the fabulous Belgian hospitality which was a constant feature of the trip. In all there were 11 fellows with representatives from Norway, Spain, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, UK, Macedonia and Turkey.

Day 1 Gent



After a slightly late evening in Brussels sampling various Belgian beers, it was a bit of a struggle with the early start to get the minibus to Gent. Dorian, the fellow from Malta was looking fresh though as his flight had arrived late and therefore he was early to bed! We were revived though after a brief snooze on the bus and ready to visit our first orthopaedic department. The University hospital at Gent serves a large population and has an extensive interlink with the basic and translational science laboratories. The orthopaedic department is led by Prof Victor and he made us feel welcome. In the morning we observed various surgical procedures. I was interested to see an uncemented hip arthroplasty with a tripolar articulation and then next door a high tibial osteotomy performed by Prof Victor. In the afternoon we congregated in the meeting room and each of the fellows gave a presentation on where they were from and what type of research projects they were working on. There was certainly a lot of variety from basic and translational science through to clinical projects. It was an engaging session and I learned a lot from it.

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With the day's work done we were escorted by Prof Victor into the city centre where we were taken on a tour by a guide. Gent is certainly a city with plenty of history and fascinating architecture. Being from Newcastle I was impressed with the Gravensteen and I will be visiting again to explore it further. After a pleasant walk along the river it was time for the evening meal and we were wined and dined at Restaurant Domestica which produced some exquisite cuisine. We were then back on the minibus to Brussels for a well deserved rest.

Day 2 Leuven

The transfer to Leuven was smooth and we arrived at the University Hospital, Pellenburg. The orthopaedic hospital is in a beautiful setting in the outskirts of the city. We were met by Prof Bellemans, an internationally renowned knee surgeon. He took us on a tour of the hospital which is well equipped including a state of the art gait laboratory. We then went into the theatre complex and discovered a hive of activity. I observed surgery by Dr Molenaers, a Paediatric orthopaedic specialist who was very accommodating and explained clearly the procedure his team was performing. This involved a rectus femoris transfer and a distal femoral osteotomy for a teenager with cerebral palsy. I was impressed by the correction of the fixed flexion deformity at the knee by the end of the case. Following the theatre session we attended the case presentation meeting and were formally introduced to the orthopaedic department. Thereafter ensued some case discussions which were interesting, particularly a complex spinal case which required careful pre-operative planning in order to achieve a good result. We were then ferried into the city centre for dinner at the exclusive Leuven University Faculty Club. Once again we were treated to excellent hospitality. The standard of the meal was at fine dining level and our wine glasses were never empty. We were then taken to the lively town centre by Prof Matricali for a few beers before heading to our plush 4 star hotel for the night.

Day 3 Brussels

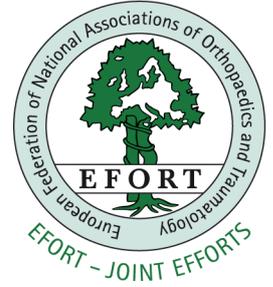
Back on the minibus to Brussels and we had split ourselves into 3 groups. Along with Dorian (Malta) and Kiril (Lithuania) I attended the Hospital Erasme on the South West side of the city. Here we attended a theatre session with Dr Vancabeke. He was actually running two theatres performing knee surgery.



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In the arthroplasty theatre we observed primary and revision knee arthroplasty and in the soft tissue knee theatre we saw a very slick ACL reconstruction followed by a patellofemoral realignment operation. This was an enjoyable session and all the staff were aimable and keen to explain their techniques. Later in the afternoon we attended the regular teaching meeting hosted by Prof Schuind. This was an informative session with the local trainees giving presentations on distal tendon of biceps repair and a particularly interesting talk on monopolar versus bipolar radial head replacements. We also gave our presentations which were well received.

We then headed off on the Metro to meet our colleagues for dinner at the Atomium restaurant. This restaurant is 92m high and affords panoramic views of Brussels. Our hosts included Prof Scheerlink who was very entertaining with a great sense of humour. At the end of the dinner we were onto the minibus for a transfer to Spa to attend the annual Belgian Orthopaedic Congress.

Day 4-6 Belgian Orthopaedic Congress, Spa

This congress was themed on infection and turned out to be a masterclass. It is not often that I take notes at conferences but many of the presentations delivered were from speakers who are international authorities on the subject. Topics ranged from infection in arthroplasty to paediatric, hand and spine. I learned a great deal from this congress and with my exit examination coming up I have excellent revision notes to refer to. The hotel we stayed at was of excellent quality and the catering at the conference was easily the best I have experienced. The conference dinner was in good quality surroundings at the Spa motor museum. On our last night we were informed that a restaurant had been booked for us with a blank cheque! We were all getting on so well by this time that we thoroughly enjoyed our last meal together- apologies to the EFORt organisers for what must have been a hefty bill! Our transfer back to Brussels was again smooth and I was back home good time to relax and reflect on a trip that I am highly recommending to my fellow trainees. We have made excellent contacts amongst the fellows and even have a plan to visit each other in the future starting with Benjamin in Slovenia next year. Thanks go to EFORt for organising this fellowship and to the Belgian residents and their senior colleagues for their hospitality, their willingness to explain their procedures so clearly and their interest in what we do in our countries.

