

Fellowship Report

Paediatric Ophthalmology Fellowship Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, Cape Town. July to November 2015

Personal details/Current status: Dr Conrad Schmoll
Consultant Ophthalmologist
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Edinburgh

Name of Funding body: Ethicon Foundation Fund

Other sources of Financial Support: Eyecare fund, Edinburgh
Fiona's Eye Fund
Personal funds

Objective of Fellowship

The main objective of the fellowship was to obtain clinical training. Having completed a Trainee Selected Component (TSC) in paediatric ophthalmology in Edinburgh, I was keen to build on experience in paediatric cataract, glaucoma and strabismus.

Nature of the Fellowship

The Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital (RXH) is a busy, state-run quaternary paediatric hospital that serves a population of approximately six million in Cape Town and the Western Cape, whilst also accepting complex referrals from other areas in Southern Africa.

Having a keen interest in paediatric ophthalmology, a fellowship at the Red Cross was recommended to me, by Prof Tony Moore, as an excellent opportunity to gain experience in this setting, working under supervision of three accomplished consultants, Dr Chris Tinley, Dr Travis Pollock and Dr Rhian Grøtte. I also worked alongside an ophthalmology registrar from the University of Cape Town (UCT) rotation.

The majority of each week was dedicated to outpatient clinic work and review of children on the hospital wards. I estimate that I saw and treated in excess of 600-700 children during this time, whilst also receiving excellent on the job training and supervision. The conditions encountered ranged from common squints and refractive errors, to complex cataract, glaucoma, congenital and acquired infection and rare inherited disorders such as incontinentia pigmenti. A major difference is that the clinics in Cape Town are run without the benefit of orthoptic and optometry support we enjoy the UK, and these were fantastic skills to acquire and apply – the benefit of which I enjoy in every clinic back in Edinburgh.

My rota also included a weekly main theatre operating list and an alternate weekly minor operations list, with some additional alternate weekly main theatre sessions.

Other experience

The RXH is situated on Rondebosch Common, a picturesque nature reserve in the Southern suburbs of Cape Town, close to the UCT and Groote Schuur, the main university hospital. I attended weekly postgraduate teaching for the ophthalmology department at Groote Schuur. The RXH is extremely well equipped to the standards of a high quality teaching children's hospital in the UK, with all the relevant subspecialties represented.

The Rondebosch area has good facilities for accommodation; options include flat rentals, guest houses or university and hospital accommodation.

A fellow at RXH needs to be registered with the Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and requires a visa to be present in South Africa for more than three months. As the fellowship is unpaid, the fellow does not require a working visa. Dr Chris Tinley can advise on requirements:
Christopher.tinley@uct.ac.za

Outcome

During the sixteen-week period, I attended 24 main theatre sessions and had the opportunity to perform 9 paediatric cataract procedures and assist in a further 8. For comparison, this is equivalent to about two years of paediatric cataract experience in Edinburgh. I encountered complex pathology, including congenital rubella, congenital syphilis, Marfan syndrome and microphthalmia. I also had the opportunity to perform 27 squint procedures (and assist in an equivalent number), 3 penetrating eye trauma emergency repairs, along with numerous oculoplastic, lacrimal and minor procedures. Other highlights were the opportunity to assist with two glaucoma procedures – a goniotomy and an Ahmed valve, and learn a variety of new techniques, which I have been able to incorporate into my practice back in Edinburgh.

In addition, I had the opportunity to attend the Cape Eye Symposium, a two day conference of excellent strabismus teaching by Prof Ed Buckley, editor of J AAPOS, where I presented a paper on adjustable suture strabismus surgery in children.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Ethicon Foundation Fund for their generous support of this unpaid clinical fellowship and the opportunity to gain such phenomenal experience in such a short space of time, working alongside a dynamic, enthusiastic and innovative consultant team. I have learned many new skills and techniques and made lifelong friends.

