IBRA Scholarship program

Output report

Program C; Scientific residential stay at a foreign host institution
Host Institution: Maastricht University Medical Center (MUMC+),
Maastricht, The Netherlands
Fellowship Director: Dr. P. Hannemann
Fellow: Nicholas Wilssens (Belgium)
Fellowship timing: January 2021 - March 2021

Scholarship report

Professional and personal experience

WHAT WERE YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOLARSHIP?

Since I have a plastic surgery background, hand surgery during my training was mainly focused on soft tissues and not so much on osseous pathology. My main professional expectation of the scholarship was to expand my experience and knowledge in treating bony lesions from initial evaluation up to the postoperative consultation. My main personal expectation was to gain more confidence in the field of hand surgery because patients feel this confidence and trust a more confident surgeon.

WHAT IS THE MAIN FOCUS OF THE IBRA TRAINING CENTER YOU ASSISTED IN?

What makes this fellowship extra interesting is the intense collaboration between the department of (trauma) surgery, the department of orthopedics and the plastic surgery department. This gave me the opportunity to have 3 different viewpoints on specific topics. The main focus was a bit different for every department. Skin and soft tissues (dupuytren, tendon problems) for the plastic surgery department; fractures and non-unions for the department of surgery; degenerative hand problems for the orthopedic department.

WHAT DID YOU DO DURING YOUR SCHOLARSHIP?

Unfortunately my scholarship took place during this COVID-pandemic and had a drastic influence on the capacity of the operating theatre in MUMC+. A lot of elective cases, especially those under general anesthesia, had to be postponed. Nevertheless I was able to perform or assist on 64 cases. I enjoyed the teaching a lot and was able to perform a lot of procedures myself under direct supervision from one of the staff members. Most of the times this was the fellowship director Dr Hannemann from the department of surgery.

Once a week we had a multidisciplinary meeting to go over all the surgeries that were planned for the coming week in the 3 departments involved in hand surgery. The cases were discussed and I was able to take part in the discussion and ask questions when needed. The staff members always tried to involve me in as many of the surgical procedures as possible.

Once a month there was a multidisciplinary outpatient clinic where we would see the most difficult/interesting cases together with the 3 departments involved as well as the physiotherapists, rheumatologist and doctors from the rehabilitation department.

I assisted on the weekly outpatient clinic with the fellowship director where I learned a lot about follow up, choosing the right procedure for the patient, setting the indication, etc. . Once every week there was also an outpatient clinic where I was able to see patients myself and discuss them afterwards with a supervisor from the orthopedics department.

This is my selection of favorite procedures:
- Distal radius fracture and more specifically evaluating the fracture using the 4-corner concept and the low treshold for a dorsal approach.
- Scaphoid non-union repair with a spongiosa bone graft and plate and screws.
- Repair of DRUJ instability with a DOB-reinforcement using palmaris longus graft.

And I plan to adopt all of them in my practice.

Even though I live in the neighboring country, there are a lot of differences between the Belgian and Dutch people. What I really appreciate is the honest and direct approach in the Netherlands. They are really open for questions and suggestions and you always get an honest and correct answer.

CLOSING WORDS

I would really like to thank IBRA for offering me the opportunity to work together with this amazing team of hand surgeons. Covid19 posed an enormous challenge for my supervisors who were always concerned about the possible limited exposure to surgical procedures and I really appreciate all that they did to adapt the schedule as much as possible. I learned a lot and gained a lot of experience, which I will be able to take with me in my further career. A special thank you goes to the fellowship director Dr Hannemann who's really committed to making the fellow feel welcome and creating a memorable fellowship both on a professional and personal level. Needless to say, I can highly recommend this fellowship and training center.

For the future fellows I think my best advice would be; don't hold back. If you don't know something; ask! If you have suggestions both in and out the operating theatre; shoot! If you have requests; ask! It's only 3 months and they go by so fast so really take all that you can out of this fellowship. You won't find any supervisors anywhere that are so easy to communicate with.