

Spine Fellowship Report

By Dr. Zhiqiang Zhou, from mainland China

The Hong Kong Spine Fellowship is definitely an invaluable experience in my whole life. I feel extremely lucky to have this precious opportunity to immerse myself in an entirely different environment that fosters collaboration, innovation, and critical thinking, where I can learn from esteemed faculty. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the entire spine team for making this fellowship highly rewarding.

My fellowship was postponed for over 2 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but thankfully, I was able to proceed with the fellowship from March 2023 to August 2023. Many thanks to secretary Tiffany Yuan, for her constant communication and seamlessly coordinating the commencement of the fellowship, making the entire experience smooth and flawless. My special thanks to Dr. Paul Koljonen for his surgery instructions and guidance to me. Prof. Yat Wa Wong, Dr. Kenny Kwan, Dr. Jason Cheung, Dr. Cheung Wai Yuen, Dr. Graham Shea, and Dr. Chris Tang, also offered me with significant help academically and surgically.

To be a DK spine fellow, I was given the chance to be involved in every aspect of the daily work, including conducting out-patient clinic, participating preoperative meetings and academic activities, as well as assisting in a wide array of spine procedures. During the process, I have witnessed and learned the tips, tricks and techniques from the masters in the ever evolving field of spine surgery. Here, I would like to share some of my fellowship experiences, which provides me with the chance to pursue greatness and acquire the well-rounded knowledge and skills necessary for a fruitful career.

Scoliosis clinic

Every Monday, I attend the scoliosis clinic at DKCH, where I am exposed to a variety of deformity cases. Most of the cases are adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS). I really enjoy this clinic, not only because most adolescent patients can speak fluent mandarin, but also I have the chance to review the long-term follow-ups of operations as well as the natural history and progression of various scoliosis cases receiving conservative treatments. The unit is also equipped with a brace lab where tailored braces are made and a dedicated and professional rehabilitation centre comprising of physiotherapists, occupational therapists and nursing staff. Most importantly, the criteria for the management of scoliosis are all evidence-based and every doctor follows the same protocols to engineer management for patients. Hence, after many times of attendance of this clinic, I have a deep understanding of the scoliosis management. Here, I also need to express my thanks to the clinic nurse team for their

tremendous help to be translators for me and patients. They are always around whenever I need any help.

Grand rounds

There will be grand rounds on Wednesday in DKCH and Friday in QMH, where all doctors, nurses, physiotherapist and occupational therapist attend. Residents, interns and I will present the in-patient cases one by one, while senior doctors will discuss the management plans and ask in-depth questions for us. I need to prepare the presentation in advance every time mainly due to the language barrier. I think grand rounds are extremely rewarding, since senior doctors like Prof. Wong Yat Wa, Dr. Kenny Kwan, Dr. Jason Cheung, and Dr. Paul Koljonen will discuss all the critical points for us. I feel like a baby to learn to start to walk during grand round, and I can feel some progress has been made for me after every grand round. I really enjoy that.

Pre-operative meetings

The spine team conducts a weekly meeting on Friday, discussing the operated cases of the previous week and upcoming cases of the next week. Similar to the grand rounds, in the pre-operative meeting, residents and I will present the cases with PPT one by one, and senior doctors will analyse all the critical points of every case. Hence, I need to prepare the PPT in advance every time, which is time-consuming but very rewarding. The preparation process gives me a chance to review the history and valuable information of all the cases, and pushes me to think deeply of every decision made by clinical doctors.

Surgical experience

During my fellowship, I assisted all kinds of spine disorders ranging from spinal deformity, degeneration, trauma, infection, tumor, and ankylosing spondylitis. And the techniques include VBT, anterior and posterior spinal fusion with instrumentation, lumbar fenestration, TLIF, OLIF, ALIF, UBE, cervical laminoplasty, and C1/C2 fusion. All the surgeons were highly skilled, and all the surgery plans were smoothly executed. And the doctors were always there to answer my questions, teach the surgery tips and tricks, and share their experience in the management of cases.

Last but not least, words cannot express my gratitude to all the people I met in Hong Kong. Overall, I am sure that this precious fellowship experience has a huge impact on my clinical practice, and I am sincerely looking forward to utilizing all the knowledge into my upcoming clinical practice to improve patient management and care in mainland.

Here are some pictures in Hong Kong.



