

Visit to the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York

Mr S Majumdar

Supported by College Travelling Fellowship

& Ethicon Foundation Fellowship Awards

The Royal College of Surgeons and Physicians of Glasgow Travelling Fellowship & Ethicon Foundation Fellowship Awards supported my short visit (one month, October 2007) to the Department of Head & Neck Surgery, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC), New York, for a one month in October, 2007.

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC), New York, is probably the most renowned cancer centre in the world, which has pioneered head and neck cancer management for nearly a century. Situated in the upper east area of Manhattan, New York, it has close links with the Cornell and New York University Medical School. It was established in the 1914. Many stalwart surgeons like Janeway, Quick, Martin, Frazell, Strong and Spiro have bedecked its memorable past. MSKCC has moved in the 21 century under the leadership of Prof. Jatin Shah. He became the Chief of the head and neck service in the year 1992 and still running strong. He is flanked by the other renowned surgeons like Prof. Ashok Shaha, Dr Dennis Kraus and Dr Jay Boyle.

Approximately 2500 new head and neck cases are seen annually at the Head & Neck Surgery department of the MSKCC and over 1200 major surgical procedures are performed. Every type of head and neck malignancy is treated at the centre including thyroid and parathyroid surgery. Prof. Ashok Shaha leads the thyroid surgery section.

A Typical day in the hospital

Work starts pretty early at the MSKCC. Most fellows and residents will be in the hospital building by 7 AM. Operating theatres start between 0700 and 0730 hours and continue until 2100 hours in the evening. Everyone worked relentlessly in a wonderfully happy environment. There were ample clinics and theatres to choose from for the observers to attend.

Clinics

There were fellows and observers from all over the world who seamlessly fitted within the very amicable head and neck surgery team. Attending Clinics with Prof. Shah and Prof. Shaha were most educational. They spent quite a lot of their time explaining different aspects of clinical management plans. Prof. Shah would often explain various nuances of radiological investigations, recent development of treatment modalities and controversies in management of different tumours.

Operating theatre

There were at least 4 operating theatres running every day for head and neck procedures. We were quite spoilt for choice. I had the opportunity to observe both the professors carrying out major head and neck and skull base procedure. I have seen over 40 major procedures during my four weeks of stay at the MSKCC. All the theatres were very spacious with more than one enormous LCD screen on the wall allowing excellent viewing of the operations. However, we were always quite lucky to get very close the table and able to listen to Prof. Shah describing the operations while watching the procedure.

Ward Rounds and Grand Rounds

The surgeons did their ward rounds with their specific teams. I was always allowed to join them. The weekly Grand Round on 0800 hours Thursday morning was attended by all staff; it was a special highlight for all of us. This was always presided by Prof. Jatin Shah; or Prof. Ashok Shaha in his absence. There would be a handful of complex clinical cases for open discussion. Everyone would get quizzed, not just the trainees! This meeting would usually last for 3 hours.

Monthly Scientific Meetings

Once a month, an early morning, scientific meeting took place at the Rockefeller wing. This consisted of a presentation from a PhD research fellow on seminal works from the scientific team of the MSKCC. I thoroughly enjoyed this meeting

Educational Facilities

We were all given full access to the library and internet resources. Most journals related to head and neck oncology was available on line. Prof. Shah allowed us to use all the teaching DVD / Videos that he has painstakingly created for his trainees. These were simply excellent teaching aids.

Conclusion

Visiting the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York, has been a significant event in my training. I would not have been able to do this without the generous support from my college and the Ethicon Foundation. I am genuinely very grateful to them. This visit has helped me to compare various aspects of management of head & neck cancer with the North American ways and learn from them as well. Soon after my return from the MSKCC I got a job at the Ninewells Hospital, Dundee as a Consultant Otolaryngologist and Head & Neck Surgeon. I would very encourage my future trainees to visit this centre of excellence.