

Dr Hugh Greenaway's 21st Superficial Anatomy and Cutaneous Surgery Course

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I was recently fortunate enough to be awarded a travelling fellowship from the BSDS to enable me to attend the 21st Superficial Anatomy and Cutaneous Surgery course in San Diego, California. This is a six day course held at the Marriott Hotel in the La Jolla (pronounced 'La Hoya') region of San Diego, with daily lab sessions at the nearby university of California campus. The course is aimed at residents and practising dermatologists in the USA and elsewhere who wish to improve their surgical skills.

Broadly speaking the course has three elements: superficial anatomy, surgical techniques for reconstruction of facial defects, and cosmetic procedures, primarily for facial rejuvenation. Formal lectures, laboratory sessions, and live demonstrations all feature on the program. In typical American fashion, the days start at 7am, and, if you wish to attend additional evening sessions, continue on until 9pm.

Surgical reconstruction of the various areas of the face was expertly covered in lecture format, including talks from some of the biggest names in dermatological surgery stateside. Then, for part of each day, we were transported across to the UCSD site for practical sessions on cadavers. The provision of fresh frozen cadavers to practice on is a unique aspect of this course, and partially explains it's high cost. It allows everyone to try out some of the complex repairs being described. I found it very useful to be able to practice taking a cartilage graft to repair a full thickness defect of the nasal sidewall. I also did a paramedian forehead flap, and performed a large rhomboid transposition with a double z-plasty, all under expert supervision from the various faculty members.

In addition to comprehensive lectures on facial anatomy, there were excellent anatomy demonstrations, which I also found to be extremely valuable. We all know that the temporal and marginal mandibular branches of the facial nerve, and the spinal portion of the accessory nerve, are vulnerable to damage during skin surgery, but nothing can show better just how precariously these nerves can sometimes be placed than to see them

expertly dissected. It's also reassuring to see how deep the main trunk of the facial nerve really lies!

The cosmetic component of the course varied in its quality and relevance. I don't foresee doing many chin implants down in Cornwall, and the live demonstration of microdermabrasion was rather underwhelming (imagine picking up a pebble from the beach and rubbing it gently over your face and you get the idea). There were also live demonstrations of chemical peels, botox, and fillers, however, which were far more instructive.

Any downsides? Well it's a bit of a nightmare getting to San Diego as there are no direct flights from the UK. I was stranded in Atlanta for several hours because of inclement weather conditions. You also have to put up with the company of American dermatology residents who can be a little tough to relate to (I ended up spending most of my spare time with the Australian and Dutch contingents). Then there are the earthquakes...half way through a talk on Moh's surgery, the biggest quake to hit San Diego in 18 years shook the building, causing fairly widespread panic for a good few minutes - that's an experience I won't forget.

Overall this is a top quality surgical course, providing learning opportunities difficult to acquire elsewhere, and is well worth the effort for anyone serious about skin surgery. It is expensive however, and I certainly couldn't have made it there without the support of the BSDS, for which I am extremely grateful.