

BSDS Travelling Fellowship Report

Dr Niamh Flanagan

Report re surgical fellowship at the Centro de Dermatovenereologia in Lisbon

As part of my ongoing training in dermatological surgery, my Trust kindly allowed me to undertake a sabbatical period, where I could further develop my skills and knowledge.

For three months from September until December 2003, I was seconded to the *Centro de Dermatovenereologica* in Lisbon, Portugal. This is the National Centre for micrographic (Mohs) surgery in Portugal. Micrographic surgery was introduced to Portugal by Dr. Antonio Picoto in the 1970's, and the centre and Dr. Picoto have an international reputation; a number of current British Dermatological Surgeons have previously also made this trip.

A beautiful city, Lisbon is a bewitching mix of the ancient and modern. "*Saudade*" is a peculiar Portuguese word that has no literal English translation, its closest approximation would be a fathomless yearning for a glorious past and one can almost feel this in the air in the sleepy old quarters of the town such as the Alfama district. Little changed in centuries, it is not difficult to imagine what it was like when, for a few heady years in the 17th century Portugal had a mighty empire and the ships of Vasco de Gama and Henry the Navigator brought the riches of the New World to the city. We decided to base ourselves down the coast from Lisbon in the pretty fishing port of Cascais, next to the more modern charms of the Estoril resort. Cascais is the centre of the local ex-pat community and is conveniently sited on the main commuter line from Lisbon. To the west are the starkly beautiful, windswept beaches of the Atlantic coast and above the mountains of the National Park and royal town of Sintra, which Byron once described as a "... glorious Eden... in variegated maze of mount and glen."

This meant a train journey of about an hour every morning to the hospital (note, the trains were always on time!) where Mohs' surgery was performed every day. The hospital takes referrals from the whole of Portugal and even from as far a field as France. I mainly worked with Dr. Antonio Picoto and Dr. Jose Labareda who were interestingly always assisted not by a scrub nurse but by another consultant dermatologist. A list would routinely comprise of 2-3 Mohs' patients (250-300 cases/ year) and often an additional 2-3 other surgical patients. The technique favoured by the department was that of using frozen sections (Fast Mohs') and I was therefore able to, in addition to learning and honing surgical techniques, develop my skills in preparing and interpreting Mohs specimens. Although I spoke little Portuguese, the doctors and other staff were all patient with me, entertained by my attempts at their language as their English mocked my linguistic ability. Now that my Portuguese adventure is over, I look back on it with professional and personal satisfaction. The help, advice and training that I have received over the three months, I have taken with me back to the U.K. and into my clinical practise. The memories of this beautiful city will last a lifetime.



**Lisbon's Alfama
District**