

Report on three months observational fellowship in Skin Surgery at Ninewells Hospital and Medical School.

Munir H. Idriss, MD
Department of Dermatovenereology, Addis Ababa University School of Medicine
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Background

I had been fortunate enough to attend a three months observational fellowship in Skin Surgery at Ninewells hospital and medical school running from March 20 to July 18, 2010 G.C. This fellowship had been made possible through the growing cooperation between my institution, the department of Dermatovenereology of the Addis Ababa University and Ninewells Hospital which had established an academic exchange program. As part of this relationship, Consultants from Ninewells would travel to Ethiopia to augment the training of residents and gain some new experience in tropical dermatology and Ethiopian trainees would travel to Dundee to learn the latest trends in the diagnosis and management of skin diseases.

This particular fellowship was made possible through the relentless efforts of Dr. Colin Fleming, Consultant Dermatologist and Mohs Surgeon at Ninewells, who was also my able mentor during the period of my training.

Funding

The fellowship was funded by the Tayside Dermatologic Research Charity and the British Society for Dermatological Surgery, and covered a roundtrip air fare from Addis Ababa to Edinburgh, ground transportation from Edinburgh to Dundee, full lodging for the period of the fellowship at Ninewells doctors' residence, a weekly stipend to cover boarding and other expenses and generous gift of a textbook of skin surgery. In addition the charity had covered all my costs to attend the annual Scottish Dermatological Society scientific conference and a one day hands on surgical training on facial plastics oncology at the Cuscheri Skills Center of the University of Dundee.

Benefits gained

The postgraduate training program in Dermatovenereology in Ethiopia is a recent venture. As a young program it needs a lot of input and support from established programs like Ninewells Dermatology especially in integral disciplines of Skin Surgery and Photobiology where there is no in country expertise. One way of extending this much needed support would be to expose Ethiopian trainees and dermatologists to the principles and practice of these subspecialty fields in Dermatology at a world class tertiary center. With this in mind the fellowship had three primary objectives to enable me to attain the maximum benefit from my training and translate this to institute new ways of teaching and practicing skin surgery back home.

The first objective was to gain new clinical knowledge, skills and experience in Skin Surgery. I had been integrated in to the daily chores within the department, seeing patients with the consultants at the general and specialty clinics, observe procedures and surgeries including Mohs micrographic surgery and other advanced procedures, attend combined, joint skin cancer and laser clinics, clinicopathologic meetings, and ward rounds. In addition I have had ample chance to practice surgical procedures on skin models during the numerous workshops organized by the department. I also had the opportunity to organize the weekly skin surgery journal clubs to discuss and learn the latest trends in cutaneous surgery. Overall I had been exposed to how skin surgery is organized, practiced and taught at a center of excellence. This has helped me boost my theoretical knowledge, develop new surgical skills, familiarize me with relevant and appropriate clinical techniques and had given me the confidence and strong desires to setup a skin surgery service in Ethiopia in the near future.

The second objective was to explore relevant literature and come up with new research ideas and question relevant to our discipline. To this end I have had a chance to critically review pertinent research literature, define a basic research topic relevant to surgical practice in Ethiopia (A comparison between simple gauze and occlusive Vaseline dressings in the post operative care of surgical wounds) and draft the study design and protocol. Applying for funding and getting ethical clearance would be the next step

The third objective was to gain insight in to and learn from the innovative techniques for undergraduate and postgraduate medical training employed by the University of Dundee. I have been able to have firsthand experience of medical teaching using different delivery modules including the latest audiovisual mediums and online courses as well as trainee assessment methods during my fellowship. I have tried to reflect my experience to suit Ethiopian needs on the development of a new curriculum for the training of skin surgery fellows and dermatology residents in the future. The final version of this draft curriculum is now ready for comment and improvement by outside experts. I have also used this opportunity to share my experience on Tropical Dermatology with medical students, registrars and consultants at Ninewells by presenting talks and lectures on chosen topics of interest.

Recommendations

This fellowship was a new learning experience for me which had helped me widen my perspective on how one can study and practice dermatology much different from the way I do back home. I hope the organizers and philanthropists behind this program would continue this righteous effort and give the same opportunity I have had to my fellow dermatologists to become better physicians helping and healing people in need of their compassion and care.