

Through The Eye of a Needle **A Nurse's View of the Stitch-Up Course**

I was fortunate enough to win the bursary offered by the BSDS for funded attendance at the Stitch Up Course, held on 21st September 2015. The bursary was offered as an incentive for nurses to attend the course, which was also attended by Junior Medical Staff. The course was run as a single day of both theoretical and practical tuition, with the aim of providing practice in a safe environment.

My motivation for applying for the bursary was to enable me to learn about performing punch biopsies in the dermatological setting, in order to increase our capacity to provide this service to our patients. There are currently 2 nurses providing this service in our dermatology department, but I had identified the need for more personnel trained in this skill, to prevent unnecessary delay for patients. I am a Staff Nurse, working mainly in Dermatology and Phototherapy in a District General Hospital on the south coast. I was delighted to have been successful in my application for the bursary and so it was that I found myself at the Vesalius Centre in Bristol on a damp Monday morning.

The day began with coffee and registration and we were provided with excellent delegate packs. There then followed three presentations covering anaesthesia (Dr Emma Pynn), suturing instruments and haemostasis (Dr Arif Aslam) and suturing techniques (Dr Catherine Roberts). The class then moved to the Veterinary Lab, for the practical aspect of the day. We were divided into groups of four per table and duly gowned and gloved, we became acquainted with our "patients" – a slab of porcine flesh. I have been a nurse for many years and have never been let loose with a scalpel until that day! (Note to self, remember to put the blade onto the handle the right way up!) I have to confess to having struggled with the "blading-up" but a very patient and obliging table companion came to my rescue. Once I had settled to my task, I immersed myself in suturing and tried various styles. I was surprised to learn that the style I know as Blanket Stitch is actually a skin suturing technique. I have used it many times on fabric! During the course of the day, the delegates were taken through techniques for incisions, complex excisions and some very complicated suturing methods. My "patient" sported a couple of simple incisions and many punch biopsies, along with various styles of sutures (some of which I was quite proud of, but others I whipped out fast before anybody saw how dreadful they were!) Some of my table companions were very bold and did some very complicated procedures on their "patients", but I decided to focus on biopsies. Our dietary needs were well catered for and there was a lovely buffet lunch. During lunch, there was the opportunity to attempt dexterity testing. A few brave souls put themselves forward for it.

I thoroughly enjoyed the day. A lot was packed in to seven hours, but it was a terrific starting point for practice and a great confidence booster. The tutors were supremely patient and were passionate about their subject. I would heartily recommend this course to everybody considering embarking on a future career in skin surgery, or wanting to expand their role within dermatology nursing.

My sincere gratitude to all involved in organizing this course.