

BSDS Travelling Fellowship Report

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Following in the footsteps of many BSDS members before me, I travelled to San Diego this summer to attend Dr Hugh Greenaway's 22nd Annual Superficial Anatomy and Cutaneous Surgery conference. This is very much the 'big brother' of the BSDS surgical workshop, ideally suited to those with a solid grounding in Dermatological Surgery, and an interest in more complex surgical procedures and reconstructions. Thanks to a 7am start each day, the intensive five-day programme contained over 30 hours of lectures and workshops and 12 hours of practical work, with several optional evening sessions for those not suffering from jet-lag. The faculty was made up of an impressive number of highly experienced dermatologists, plastic surgeons and anatomists, with most lectures of a very high standard. The 140 delegates were mainly American residents and private practitioners, with Europe represented by a large group from the Netherlands and four UK dermatologists.

The first half-day was mainly devoted to lectures on the anatomy of head and neck, with particularly relevant emphasis on surgical 'danger zones'. Local anaesthesia, regional nerve blocks and methods of haemostasis were also included in this session. Lectures during the subsequent two and a half days focussed on reconstructive techniques, with specific attention to the nose, lip, ear and peri-orbital area. Each day ended with a problem-solving small group workshop in which we were called on individually to plan reconstructive options for tricky surgical defects, with tactful help from members of the faculty. I was glad to have been exposed to similar sessions both at BSDS workshops and as part of local meetings; many of the USA delegates were new to the 'reconstructive ladder' and found these pretty stressful. The lectures were consolidated by eight hours of practical sessions at the University of Southern California, using fresh (i.e. non formalin-fixed) human cadavers. No pigs' heads here – though cold and slightly 'stiff' the skin moves almost as in life, and provides the perfect surgical practice medium. During these sessions we dissected out important structures, explored surgical 'danger zones', practiced nerve blocks, and carried out procedures including a wide range of flaps, full- and split-thickness skin grafting, wedge excisions of ear, lip and eyelid, and culminating in paramedian forehead flaps and free and composite cartilage grafts.

In the latter 2 days of the course the emphasis shifted to cosmetic dermatology. Chemical peels, fillers, Botox, laser resurfacing, liposuction, thermage, fat transfer and blepharoplasty were all covered, some more convincingly than others, with live demonstration of the first three techniques using members of the admin staff and one Professor of Dermatology as willing subjects. Much of this seemed irrelevant to the current role of a UK NHS dermatologist, but these lectures would certainly satisfy any requirement for cosmetic dermatology training which may be included in the SpR curriculum in the future. It was also a useful insight into perceptions of aging in the USA, and into the almost universal use of Botox among dermatology residents! Don't go for a relaxed week in the sun - the busy timetable leaves little time or energy for sightseeing. Most delegates stay in the Marriott hotel, where the lectures are held, a comfortable brick monolith surrounded by freeways, several miles from the (beautiful) coast. I had my family in tow so stayed in a cheaper beachside hotel and travelled by taxi each day. Unfortunately we encountered 'June Bloom', a heavy bank of sea mist which sits over San Diego for much of June, as well as two earthquakes, including our very own Tsunami warning! I would recommend adding a week's holiday to your visit – we managed to see Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon and, of course, Disneyland. There is also plenty to do and see in San Diego. Do go for a thorough overview of skin surgery techniques, high quality tuition and a valuable opportunity to practice surgery on non-formalin fixed human skin.

The practicalities: For information on future courses contact Maureen Helinski at ocme@ucsd.edu. The cost this year was \$1675 (about £900), with accommodation not included. Booking starts from around December. We flew direct to Los Angeles, which cost £500 and took around 10 hours. From there it's a 3 hour drive down the coast to San Diego.

I am very grateful to the BSDS for granting me a Travelling Fellowship which helped to fund my attendance at this course.