

University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas
Department of Dermatology: Skin surgery and oncology

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In preparation for a year's fellowship in procedural dermatology at the Southwestern University in Dallas, I spent time familiarising myself with the department prior to attending the 71st American Academy of Dermatology annual conference. My first impression of the University hospital, as I looked at immense buildings scattered across the highway, was that its size is more than a little daunting, but then everything in Texas seems bigger!

With surprisingly few Stetsons in sight I accomplished my first challenge, finding the dermatology department. This incorporates a busy Mohs unit with nine theatres and over 3500 Mohs cases performed annually, under the direction of Drs Taylor and Srivastava. Interesting cases from the regions are discussed at the weekly breakfast tumor conference, melanoma meeting and grand round.

I was introduced to the computerized medical record system, the complex coding classifications for costing patient attendances and of course witnessed Mohs

procedures including for basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and lentigo maligna. I had a preview of the gruelling schedule that is medical training in America- starting work at 6.30am, on-call one week in two and, yes, it is true that they have very little annual leave, only 10 days per year!

A typical working day involves starting in the office before sunrise, ready to go through the notes and pre-assess patients as they arrive. Patients are subsequently marked and local anaesthetic infiltrated in preparation for taking the first layer. Around twelve patients are completed in the mornings and, as in the UK, repairs are usually performed in-house. The afternoon can include a mixture of more Mohs cases and other dermatology surgery procedures, such as wide local excisions, referred in from around the region, with the last patient leaving by around 6pm. The day is finished by telephone consults with post-op patients, completing the computerised op notes and, of course, dictation. Apart from on-call duties, the fellow has the weekends off.

As I have already had a few queries from around the country, I thought it might be helpful for other trainees to outline my experiences in applying for a USA fellowship:

1. Obtain USMLE (United States Medical Licensing Examination) - the earlier you start the better! It goes right back to undergraduate preclinical medicine, and Step 2 Clinical Skills needs to be taken at an American examination centre.
2. Register for ECFMG (Educational Committee for Foreign Medical Graduates) certification (this doesn't come automatically). Without this you probably won't be eligible to apply, and additionally this is needed to secure an ECFMG-sponsored VISA for working in USA. ECFMG certification is obtainable after Step 1, Step 2 Clinical Knowledge and Step 2 Clinical Skills.
3. Check the requirements for each institution, as these seem to be constantly changing. Unfortunately many institutions are closing the door to non-US trainees, unless of course you have completed their residency

programme and sat the American Boards in dermatology. Although somewhat out-of-date I found the following website helpful in terms of naming programmes that have offered dermatology fellowships including Mohs, derm path and paediatrics. It still provides a useful starting point with contact details for each university. I literally worked through the list state by state.

<http://www.dermatologyoutlines.com/dermfellowshipsb.html>

4. Send a formal email preferably to the programme director, or alternatively their administrative assistant, explaining who you are, what stage you are at and ask what their prerequisites are. I would also recommend attaching a CV. If it turns out you are eligible I would definitely suggest visiting the department, firstly so that they know you are a serious candidate, secondly it can act as an informal interview and thirdly so you can check them out and make sure it's what you really want.
5. Register for the San Francisco Match Mohs Micrographic Surgery fellowship subsection www.sfmitch.org (This costs \$50 and opens around June).
6. Select the fellowship programs you are applying to (one fee covers all) on the match website but send the applications individually to each department.

NB Each program has its own application schedule and format so check carefully. At a later date you will be asked to rank your choices following interview. The ranking deadline is around October-time and it's a bit of a waiting game until the match results are released in mid-December.

Be prepared for endless emailing, a lot of paperwork and waiting.

I wish you the best of luck and if you have further questions I can help with then please email me on sarah.felton@nhs.net

Happy hunting!



Sincere thanks go to the British Society for Dermatological Surgery for awarding me the Travelling Fellowship in support of my visit to Dallas and the AAD, both of which provided me with exceptional education experiences which I shall build on in the future.