

BSDS Travel Fellowship Report

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I was fortunate to be awarded a BSDS travel fellowship to attend Hugh Greenway's 34th Superficial Anatomy and Cutaneous Surgery course in San Diego, California and then to visit the University of California San Francisco Mohs surgery unit for a further week.

The Hugh Greenway course has become something of a right of passage for budding Mohs surgeons. The course covers anatomy; skin flaps and grafts; and some aspects of cosmetic dermatology including botox, fillers, sclerotherapy and scar management. Experts in the field of dermatological surgery and cosmetic dermatology deliver all lectures and they are generally enthusiastic and inspiring. A vital aspect of the course is the opportunity to practice new skills and techniques on cadavers. Delegates are put into groups of five per cadaver and each table has a different instructor (Mohs surgeon) per day to assist and teach. There is no slacking on course, with lectures running from 07:30 am until 21:00 most days, apart from the day with the course dinner, which provides an opportunity to socialise with your fellow attendees. In any case, the high cost of the course ensures delegates want to make the most of every minute! I learnt too much to put into this short report, but suffice to say I would recommend this course at surgical fellowship level to consolidate and expand knowledge and skills.

After my time in San Diego I flew to San Francisco in order to visit the Mohs unit there, part of the University of California. Organising this part of the trip involved seemingly endless paperwork and emails, starting three or four months before the trip. On arrival however the process was very smooth, with everyone expecting me and welcoming. In some ways the department was very similar to the one I trained in in Wales, with six theatre rooms, surgical fellows, two Mohs surgeons (one on leave) and junior colleagues. The insurance system and coding were notable exceptions to this, with the doctors there willing and happy to explain the system. The cases operated on tended overall to be smaller than the ones I have encountered, with Mohs even being performed on SCC in situ, something that surprised me! The data on number of Mohs levels per patient (average 1.6-1.7) was entirely consistent with ours however. They have no waiting list, as there are many private Mohs surgeons available, and patients travel from miles around and have ultimate choice as to where they are treated. This meant some patients travelling from a different state for treatment if they wished. This has implication for suture removal and follow up, but I was surprised to see how willing patients are to travel: my experience in the UK is that if the local hospital is not within about 20 minutes there are grumbles! The mixture of cosmetic private work in the working day was new to me, although not entirely unexpected in view of their funding system.

The doctors and nurses in the department were friendly, welcoming and hard working and I would recommend anyone to visit should they wish to gain insight and experience of a US Mohs unit. Be prepared to spend money though, San Francisco is a very expensive city! The food was excellent, with variety to suit everyone's tastes.

These two weeks in California gave me food for thought prior to commencing my consultant job back in Wales, and I hope have helped forge links between the UK and San Francisco. I wish to thank the BSDS for awarding this travel fellowship that enabled me to have this valuable and interesting experience.