**Junior ASEAN Travelling Fellowship - 25 September to 24 October 2011**

The ASEAN traveling fellowship program was started in 1983 with the intention to promote cross cultural exchange between the 6 member countries of the ASEAN Orthopaedic Association – Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam. One representative would be selected from each national orthopaedic association, and the fellows would travel together, visiting each country for about a week. The fellows would be invited to witness first-hand the medical facilities, teaching programs, and surgeries at the various hospitals in the host countries. In addition, each fellow would be required to present a paper, and given an opportunity to listen to the research efforts undertaken by the other fellows and the host countries. The fact that the traveling fellowship program been running continuously for the last 28 years is a testament to its success, and many of our senior orthopaedic surgeons have once been beneficiaries of this program, and still retain fond memories of the time spent during their traveling fellowship.

I started my program by flying to Hanoi, Vietnam, where I met up with the rest of the traveling fellows. We were a diverse group of varying seniority, aged 30-40 years, with interests in trauma, sports, spine and microsurgery. The next 2 days were spent at 108 Hospital, one of the largest military hospitals in Vietnam, which also provided civilian medical care. There, we participated in their morning rounds, where operations performed or trauma cases admitted the day before were discussed. The hospital also showcased their experience at microsurgery and flap reconstruction; the cases presented included major replantation, multi digit replantation, and a number of composite free flap reconstructions, some of which had been presented in international conferences. We were then brought round to the various subspecialty wards. There, we saw local cost efficient modifications of various splints, traction devices and a home designed Ilizarov type frame, which cost only a fraction of the actual device. We also visited the operating theatre complex, where we saw 5 orthopaedic theaters running concurrently. Cases we saw included a limb lengthening with a monolateral frame, total hip replacement, PCL reconstruction, decompression laminectomy and free flap reconstruction of a huge forearm soft tissue defect down to bone. The 3rd day, we were treated to a visit to the world famous Halong Bay with a cruise around its magnificent limestone cliffs. Our dinner was a special affair at an outlying “snake village”, where the fare consisted of fresh cobra, and plenty of Hanoi volka, that left everyone drunk and puking in the WC.

The fellows then flew to Singapore, where they were welcomed to our cultural heritage sites of Little India and China Town. We were hosted by SGH, CGH, TTSH, NUH and KKWCH, where we attended morning meetings, and viewed the wards and operating theatres. The fellows were most impressed by our ward organization, and our Computer on Wheels (COWS). Dinners were spent indulging in our delightful local cuisine, at Straits Kitchen, Muthu’s Curry, not to mention black pepper crab at Long Beach Seafood restaurant.

The next leg of the trip took us to Malaysia, where we started the visit with a tour of Putrajaya, the famed administrative centre, which was the brainchild of Dr Mahathir Mohammad. The afternoon was spent visiting sights in KL, including the Istana Negara, the National Museum, National Mosque, National Monument and Merdeka Square. The next 3 days were spent on hospital visits, namely Universiti Kebansaan Malaysia Medical Centre (UKM), Universiti Malay Medical Centre (UM), Sungei Buloh Hospital, and Serdang Hospital. We had the opportunity to participate in the morning meetings and case discussions, as well as visit the wards in these hospitals. I was particularly impressed by the tissue engineering and cell therapy centre at UKM, which featured state of the art equipment and dedicated researchers, many overseas trained, engaging in the culture of various tissue types and their clinical application to regenerative medicine. We were also invited to participate in the weekly resident training session at UM, where the final year trainees had to clerk a designated patient, perform a physical examination and discuss the case in front of an audience which included the seniors in the department, much like what we were expected to do for the FRCS. Sungei Buloh Hospital, a designated spine training centre, and Serdang Hospital, a centre for the AO courses in Malaysia, were both relatively new hospitals. We got the opportunity to visit the state of the art facilities in these hospitals, which had computerized their medical records and X-rays and gone paperless.

Our final stop saw us fly to Bankok, Thailand, where we visited the 3 main medical training centres - Chulalongkorn University, Ramathibodi Hospital, and Siriraj Hospital. There, we participated in morning conferences with case discussions and research presentations. We also visited the hospital facilities including the wards, operating theatres, and rehabilitation centres. I was particularly impressed by the Cadaver Surgical Training Facility in Chulalongkorn University, which features a fully functional operating theatre suite with fluoroscopy, allowing training for a wide spectrum of procedures from open to arthroscopic surgery. We also visited Lerdsin Hospital, a famous Hand and Microsurgery training centre, and was hosted by Dr Somsak Leechavengvong, who presented his work on brachial plexus and nerve reconstruction, many of which had seen appearance in international conferences and journals. In between the hospital visits, we took time to tour the sights of Bankkok, including Wat Arun, and the Grand Palace. The fellowship ended with us transferring to Pattaya for the joint 33rd RCOST and 31st AOA Congress, where we stayed in the luxurious Royal Cliff Beach Resort, and were treated to the colourful night life of Pattaya. It was a kind of homecoming for us all, as we met all our hosts from the various ASEAN countries again, and bided our fond farewells.

The traveling fellowship has given me the unique opportunity to learn about orthopaedic practice in the ASEAN countries. Despite economic constrains, many hospital have been able to maintain a high standard of care by developing low cost alternatives to orthopaedic appliances. In addition, many institutions regularly send their staff overseas on conferences and fellowship to keep up to date with the latest in orthopaedic developments. Our neighbours have developed an exceptionally high standard in trauma management and microsurgery due to the nature of their caseload, and have much to offer us in terms of learning opportunities. The traveling fellowship is as much an academic program as it is a social one. Throughout the 5 weeks, I have had the fortune to visit the sights and appreciate the culture of our fellow ASEAN countries. The time spent traveling together has cemented our friendship and ties that I hope we can bring into the future.

*Poh Seng Yew*

*Junior ASEAN Orthopaedic Association Traveling Fellow 2011*