USANZ Trainee Week
Young urologists benefit from comprehensive, quality training

From November 18 to 22 last year the annual Trainee Week of the Urological Society of Australia & New Zealand (USANZ) took place in Melbourne and Geelong in Victoria, Australia. This programme is a component of the SET (Surgical Education and Training) Programme and is compulsory for all Australian and New Zealand SET (Surgery Education and Training) trainees.

Approximately 60 trainees from across Australia and New Zealand and – as part of a reciprocal arrangement with international associations – six trainees from the European Association of Urology (EAU), the Urological Association of Asia (UAA), the British Association of Urological Surgeons (BAUS) and the Canadian Urological Association (CUA) attended the meeting.

After successfully completing the FEBU Written exam September 2012, I was selected and invited by the EAU to register for this programme and I felt very honoured and curious of this unexpected possibility to learn more about the Australian Urology Trainee Programme and also the Australian people and culture.

Organisational background
USANZ, the official and professional body for urologists in Australia and New Zealand, is committed to clinical excellence, education, promotion of research and the dissemination of information on urological topics. On the other hand, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is the principal body for the training and education of surgeons in both countries. Accreditation is given by the Australian Medical Council and the Medical Council of New Zealand to the RACS which sets the standards for education and training.

The Board in Urology of the RACS has oversight for the conduct of the training programme in urology across Australia and New Zealand, and reports to the Board of Surgical Education and Training and the Council of the RACS.

USANZ collaborates with the RACS as an agent of the College, administers the training programme in Australia and manages the Board in Urology, otherwise known as the Training, Accreditation and Education Committee (TAE Committee).

Education and training
The SET Programme in urology is designed to improve the quality and efficiency of surgical education and training. It starts with two years (SET 1+2) of general surgical skills, followed by three years (SET 3-5) of advanced clinical urology training and ends with the Senior level, respectively a minimum time of six years.

The Trainee Week, which is held in a different Australian state each year or in New Zealand, started before, or due to the fact that all trainees have to rotate for their working place/hospital (and in the majority of cases also the town), annually.

The programme included the Welcome BBC, a Social programme including the Welcome BBQ, a social gathering of the trainees and a dinner with the TAE Committee, Delegates and Trainees.

The openess and friendliness of the Australian and New Zealand trainees made the international participants feel welcome background including important studies is important in preparing for the exam, thus most of them are well prepared.

During the next four days an intensive programme is scheduled with a series of excellently presented lectures, case discussions in small groups, trainee presentations and a very informative lesson about exam performance from an examiner’s as well as a psychologist’s point of view.

I was surprised of the active role the SET4 and especially SET5 trainees had in the programme. During the lecture series, the trainees also presented alternating with urologists, and also led the small group case discussions and, as previously mentioned, acted as examiners in the oral exam. For me, it seemed that most of the trainees know each other, perhaps because of the Trainee Weeks they have attended before, or due to the fact that all trainees have to rotate for their working place/hospital (and in the majority of cases also the town), annually.

The Australian and New Zealand SET trainees enjoyed a good reputation in international urology and this could be attributed to their training as previously described. Changing residence every year impacts one’s private life and for me, as a European, this is hard to imagine. But otherwise this programme offers the possibility to a consistent quality in education and training and a fair competition to all trainees. Furthermore, the trainees learn to accept new responsibilities and perform with confidence.

Compared with Austria, in Australia there seem to be no influence of a “settled (or conservative) urology”, which could explain why there’s a greater focus on surgical (operative) education during the resident years. It’s also advantageous that, with the beginning of the fifth year, the SET trainees are allowed and encouraged to take their “Final Clinical Examination.” This enables them to concentrate on the operative or surgical part during the last two years of training.

Social programme
The social programme included the Welcome BBC, a dinner with the major sponsors and the Final Dinner. The international participants were warmly welcomed and introduced on the first day by Richard Grilli, Deputy Chair, and Board of Urology Member, and subsequently by the extraordinary Mrs. Deborah Klein, who is responsible for organising the Trainee Week. Whenever there were questions or a problem before or during the meeting, Deborah was always there to provide help.

The openness and friendliness of the Australian trainees also helped the international participants to feel welcome and I guess everybody made new friendships and returned home with new ideas. It is also an amazing thing for me to realise that one can travel to “the other end of the world” and come to meet people who also previously worked with one’s colleagues. All these contacts can perhaps lead to professional cooperation or the chance to work abroad.

It was my first time to visit Australia and I regretted that I didn’t have enough time to arrange for a longer stay. It would have been interesting to also visit an Australian department of urology or see more of this fascinating country. But it won’t surely be the last time that I will visit Australia.

References