

USANZ Trainee Week

Young urologists benefit from comprehensive, quality training



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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 (2-5) trainees.

Approximately 90 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 Trainee Programme and also the Australian people and culture.

Organisational background

USANZ, the official and professional body for urological surgeons 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 (TA&E 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 with practice examinations (Practice Vivas and Written Examination). All SET4 trainees undertook the oral exams and were examined by a SET5 trainee together with a urological consultant. I was fortunate to observe these exams with the SET3 trainees and the other international registrars.

There are four oral exams; Anatomy and Operative Surgery, Pathology, Structure Oral and Clinical Investigation and Management. These exams are designed to help the trainees prepare for the final Fellowship Examination. Trainees learn the style of exam questions and how to think and answer in a structured way. I got the impression that all of the trainees had a solid basic knowledge of urology, including anatomy and pathology. Furthermore, trainees know that knowledge of the scientific



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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 enjoy 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 system 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 Grills, Deputy Chair & Board of Urology Member and the extraordinary Mrs. Deborah Klein, who is responsible for organising the Trainee Week. Whenever there were queries 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 ones 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.



The skyline of Melbourne