EUROPEAN UROLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME (EUSP)

Andrology Unit
University College Hospital at Westmoreland Street
(formerly the Heart Hospital)
London, England

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Introduction

The European Urology Scholarship Programme (EUSP) gave me the fantastic opportunity to visit a centre of excellence in the field of andrology. I was very happy of being accepted by the andrology unit of the University College London Hospitals (UCLH).

Before I came to London I received a very warm welcome letter from my scholarship supervisor, Mr. David Ralph in which he drew a plan of my clinical visit. He is a consultant urological surgeon within UCLH and president of the European Society for Sexual Medicine (ESSM). He is heavily involved in postgraduate training, running live surgery courses and lecturing both at the European School of Urology and the American Association of Urology.

About the UCLH andrology unit

The andrology unit manages patients with Peyronie’s disease, priapism, erectile dysfunction (including implantation of penile prostheses) and male factor infertility. Throughout the United Kingdom, patients are referred here. This unit is also the supraregional centre for penile and testicular cancer. Phalloplasty is performed here for micropenis, following amputation, and transgender. Research interests, among others, are focused on a new drug trial for treatment of Peyronie’s disease and preservation of fertility in patients with testicular cancer.

The andrology unit is located at the UCLH hospital at Westmoreland Street (formerly Heart Hospital) within the Central London. Apart from thoracic surgery, there are units that provide urological service. The Urology Service at UCLH comprises of six sub-specialist teams: adolescent urology, andrology, female reconstruction, male reconstruction, stones and uro-oncology.

Scholarship activities

A morning round is done by a dedicated consultant who performs a check-up of recently operated patients and decides about their discharge. Operative schedule is divided between morning and afternoon shifts, each covered by a different consultant. Work at the theatre begins at 9 am and is usually finished by 6 pm. The andrology unit has two theatres which are often simultaneously occupied.

The most common operation I witnessed was the implantation of penile prosthesis. I had a chance to observe the insertion of the different types of that device (3-piece, 2-piece and malleable) and various operative techniques. The surgeons were very keen to explain each step of the procedures, answer questions, and share some of their tips and tricks. Other common type of surgeries were corrections of penile curvature like plications, Nesbit and Lue procedures (with a patch graf). The operative microscope was often used during the procedures like subinguinal varicocelectomy or TESE.
I was impressed by the perfect cooperation between the surgical team and embryologist during the sperm harvesting procedures which could improve the outcome and is very important to plan further management. The most demanding operation I have seen was a phaloplasty done by Mr. Ralph and the team due to micropenis. This procedure took eight hours and required excellence in microsurgery.

The outpatients clinic operates three days a week. Andrological patients are seen by consultants or their fellows/registrar. After being qualified for the surgery every patient is invited for an appointment for a pre-assessment of his general health status. During the visit, a patient is given thorough information regarding his problem and the chance to discuss his doubts with a physician (e.g. concerning choice of the implant). The patients are often encouraged to visit with their partners. The standard of confidentiality and privacy in UCLH is at a very high level, which in my opinion, can result to better cooperation of patients.

The outpatients clinic is also a place where the patients are been given a training on how to use vacuum devices and how to perform intracavernosal injections of alprostadil. This is done by a nurse who specialises in working with an andrological patient.

During my clinical visit, I had an opportunity to assist the radiologist in performing a doppler examination of the penis and to be involved in the decision-making process regarding further with clinicians regarding further management. It was a totally new experience, which I found very educational and possibly beneficial to my everyday practice.

On Fridays, I joined the team at Euston Road UCL hospital where majority of the surgical procedures regarding penile cancer took place, including penectomy, hemi- and radical inguinal lymphadenectomy, and sentinel node biopsy.

I was also invited to join multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings where cases were discussed (there was a separate meeting for oncological and benign cases) and an operative schedule for the following week was made. In the hospital there is a special place for doing a research. On the same street, you have a library with reading rooms if you need to study. Hospital cafeteria provides the daily meals.

**Accommodation**

Finding accommodation in London should not be a big problem although it can be quite expensive in comparison to other cities in the UK. First of all, one should check the location of the hospital and its transport connection to the place where one plans to stay. One has to bear in mind the rush hour when commuting by bus.
I rented a room in a private house located in London’s zone 2 (the city is divided in nine zones). I was fortunate because it had a very convenient connection by tube (just one line to get to the hospital). UCLH has a net of accommodation within London for students and staff. However, it may be difficult to arrange something just for a short term and one has to it in advance. I recommend contacting the John Astor House on Foley Street because it is the accommodation within a walking distance to Westmoreland Hospital.

As a city with a huge number of attractions, London does not require special advertisement. There are plenty of places that are worth visiting; world-class museums (free entrance), famous landmarks like the Tower of London or the Houses of Parliament and its beautiful parks. It is known as a world in one city due to a wealth of different cultures and various communities throughout the capital. The city has an extensive and developed transport network. Once you purchase an Oyster card, which is a credit-card-sized electronic ticket, you gain access to all public transport services in both Central and Greater London.

**Conclusion**

Participating in the EUSP was a perfect opportunity to visit a centre of excellence and gain a new experience that will definitely have a positive impact on my career. I would strongly recommend it to all residents. Do not miss your big chance and apply to become a EUSP scholar. And last but not least, a special word of appreciation for Ms. Angela Terberg of the EUSP office for always being very helpful during all my steps of scholarship programme.

**Acknowledgement**

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