

A Pursuit for Craniofacial Fellowship at Chang Gung Craniofacial Center, Taiwan

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The humble beginning of the plastic and reconstructive surgery department at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taiwan was the brainchild of a missionary surgeon from the United States of America, Dr. Samuel Noordhoff. Under his leadership, Chang Gung's Plastic Surgery Department has been transformed into one of international repute. Today, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taiwan is widely known by many plastic surgeons throughout the world as the Mecca for higher training in plastic and reconstructive surgery, particularly in the field of craniofacial and microsurgery.

I consider myself fortunate for having been offered a Clinical and Research Fellowship post at Chang Gung Craniofacial Center at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital. Each year, there are four craniofacial fellowship posts offered to foreign surgeons who wish to undertake this subspecialty. It was in April 2007 when I first arrived at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital to pursue my one-year fellowship in craniofacial surgery. I was mesmerized by this huge hospital with a wide range of subspecialties within the plastic and reconstructive surgery department. Soon after my arrival, I was introduced to the professors, attending surgeons, residents and other international fellows in a morning departmental meeting.

I had the opportunity to choose my rotations with the professors and supervisors who would guide me throughout my fellowship training at Chang Gung Craniofacial

Center.

Many educational activities were conducted throughout the week by the professors or attending staffs. Three CME meetings were held every Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday mornings at 7.15 a.m., before the commencement of our daily routine. In addition, special lectures or demonstrations on aesthetic surgery would also be scheduled every fortnight for the departmental staff, fellows and residents. My first two-month rotation was well spent with Associate Professor Chen Tzung-Chung in the trauma unit of the plastic and reconstructive surgery department. Each day, there were many craniofacial trauma cases referred to this hospital.

The workload here was tremendous and I was often called to attend to some of these trauma cases. I was able to learn various approaches to complex craniofacial cases using the conventional methods as well as endoscopic approaches for reconstruction.

After a two-month stint in craniofacial trauma unit, I had a three-month rotation with Professor Lo Lun-Jou, who is the chairman of the plastic and reconstructive department of Chang Gung Memorial Hospital. Professor Lo has a busy schedule. Besides managing the department matters, he operates and sees his patients in the clinic three times a week. During my posting with Professor Lo, I had the opportunity to learn various surgical techniques for cleft lip, cleft palate, secondary cleft deformity, orthognathic surgery, cranioplasty and facial aesthetic surgery, such as blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, facial contouring surgery and liposuction. Professor Lo has a special interest in simulation surgery. He frequently uses the computer-assisted model to plan and treat complex craniofacial cases. My rotation with Professor Lo was indeed rewarding and I gained plenty of new experiences.

Following my rotation with Professor Lo, I had a two-month rotation with Associate Professor Dr. Philip Chen Kuo-Ting, who is the director of the craniofacial unit at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital. Associate Professor Philip Chen was indeed the most popular craniofacial surgeon in the hospital. As I recalled, there were many times that we had to operate past midnight because of the long patient list.

It is not unusual to have an average of 20 or more patients a day in his busiest operating schedule! Therefore, these patients were cleverly distributed among the fellows and senior residents in order to get the operations completed within the stipulated time. My rotation with Associate Professor Philip Chen has taught me to

perfect my skills in cleft surgery in a quick and precise way!

One of the most respectable craniofacial surgeons who has taught me so much about the principles and philosophies of good craniofacial care is Professor Chen Yu-Ray. My three-month rotation with Professor Chen Yu-Ray has learnt in great details about the art of craniofacial surgery, particularly in orthognathic surgery and aesthetic surgery. I was very impressed with Professor Chen Yu-Ray's patience and guidance. It seemed like every surgical technique that was taught to me was just like a beautiful dance step, which was clearly explained and shown. During my craniofacial fellowship at Chang Gung Craniofacial Center, I also spent two months with Dr. Chen Zung-Chung, who was the master of auricular reconstruction.

My posting with Dr. Chen Zung-Chung has clearly defined my interests in microtia treatment. I have learnt the surgical techniques for microtia in great detail. Dr. Chen Zung-Chung has inculcated the importance of good craftsmanship, which is the essence of an aesthetically presentable ear.

Every fellow who pursues craniofacial fellowship training at Chang Gung Craniofacial Center is required to carry out some research projects. During my rotations with the respective professors and supervisors, I was given several research projects involving craniofacial trauma, cleft lip/palate, orthognathic surgery and microtia. My stay at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital for a period of one year allowed me to meet and share my experiences with other fellows and visiting surgeons from all over the world such as from Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Belgium, Australia, China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia. Despite our busy schedules in the operating theatres and clinics, we had many social events to recharge and foster our bonds with the staffs and other fellows. By the end of March 2008, I had finally completed my craniofacial fellowship.

I felt heavy-hearted leaving this wonderful place due to commitments with family and patients back home in Malaysia. Nevertheless, I will always cherish the great time and experience that I have gained during my one-year craniofacial fellowship training at Chang Gung Craniofacial Center. I look forward to visiting my alma mater in the near future.

In summary, my craniofacial fellowship training at Chang Gung Craniofacial Center was truly an unforgettable experience. It has indeed exposed me to the wide spectrum of craniofacial cases, and the different surgical techniques available to

tackle them. The experiences acquired from my fellowship training were invaluable and I feel well equipped to face the challenges in my future practice as a craniofacial surgeon.

