An Ecuadorian in Asia: Learn, live, laugh, share, SLARD-APKASS 2016

Writing methodological designs, posing new research goals, or developing definitions on a technical topic in Orthopaedics, is relatively easy as compared to writing while taking an academic trip.

I was content with receiving the notification that I met the requirements for this fellowship, no matter if I won or not. However, a month later the President of the SLARD (Latin American Society of Arthroscopy, Knee and Sport) formally notified me that I had won a SLARD-APKASS (Asia-Pacific Knee, Arthroscopy and Sports Medicine Society) Travelling Fellow Scholarship. I immediately began the formal procedures required for my trip, but unfortunately on 16 April 2016, Ecuador suffered a terrible natural catastrophe. An earthquake of 7.8 on the Richter Scale destroyed several cities and a State of Exception was declared, which barred public servants (i.e. individuals who worked in a public hospital, such as myself) from leaving their place of work, go on vacation, or leave the country. The declaration was maintained for three months, which prevented me from beginning my trip as planned and meant that I was unable to travel to New Zealand or Australia. This did not deter me and I was able to meet the other SLARD-APKASS Travelling Fellows in Singapore for the remainder of the planned trip when the declaration was lifted. I thank SLARD, the organisers and my fellow travellers for their understanding and ability to facilitate alternate arrangements for me.

Singapore: a contemporary metropolis

I began my long journey from my beloved city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, travelling through Houston and Japan and finally arriving in Singapore. I was kindly received upon arriving and transferred to the hotel.

I began my first day in Singapore by meeting the other travelling fellows: Dr Alexandra Nicolini (Brazil), Dr Horacio Rivarola Etcheto (Argentina), and the leader of our group, Dr Vicente Gutierrez (Chile). After the formalities, we proceeded to the National University Hospital of Singapore where we met our hosts, Prof. James Hui and Prof. Lingaraj Krishna. They introduced us to the hospital chiefs and gave us an introduction to the hospital, in which we would soon be attending meetings and conferences (Fig. 1). After lunch at the Long Beach Restaurant with our hosts, we returned to the hospital to observe a knee surgery performed by Prof. James Hui. He performed corrective knee surgery using: Trockoplasty, Fulker-son Technique and LPF medial plasty. It was an afternoon of learning and exchanging our own knowledge of orthopaedic science. We completed the day by having dinner at the Singapore Country Club courtesy of Prof. James Hui, a member of the distinguished club.

My impression of Singapore after the first day was that it is a warm and inviting city, meant to be enjoyed. On the second day, we were taken to the Changi General Hospital to visit Dr Dave Lee, head of the Traumatology and Orthopaedics Service. We joined his meeting with the medical staff, medical specialists and post-graduate doctors. Our own conference began with a brief welcome, followed by presenting ourselves and our work, being introduced to the medical staff, hosting a question and answer session and we finished the conference by taking a group photo and being presented with gifts by the host team. Our hosts surprised us with a beautiful 30km bike ride around the Marina Bay, with the Traveling Fellows, Dr Lee and two postgraduate doctors (Fig. 2). Following our bike tour, we were taken to the Singapore Swimming Club for a refreshing swim in the pool, followed by lunch with Dr Lee.

After a brief rest, we attended dinner at the National Kitchen by Violet Oon at the National Gallery Singapore, located in City Hall. We celebrated Dr Rivarola’s birthday, presented a gift to our Singapore hosts, Dr Hui, Dr Lee and Dr Linjaraj. It was a fun and cozy dinner with new friends from around the world (Fig. 3).

We spent our third day at the National University Hospital with our host, Dr Denny Li, the distinguished head of the Arthroscopy Group. We enjoyed a typical breakfast at the hospital, followed by a conference in the auditorium where we shared our own scientific research, techniques and hosted a question and answer session. After the conference, we went to the Orthopaedic operating room to witness an arthroscopic rotator cuff repair performed by Dr Li. We shared our own experiences in our respective hospitals and we were introduced to the surgical team, nurses, and anaesthesiologist, among others. We had lunch with the surgeons, where we shared our own impression of the hospital (Fig. 4). In the afternoon, we were able to freely enjoy Singapore and we decided to ride the Singapore Flyer, which is a giant Ferris wheel overlooking the city.

On the final night in Singapore, we were surprised with a beautiful farewell dinner at a Hindu restaurant (Fig. 5). We shared memorable moments of the Singapore leg of our trip and we sang with each other; I sang ‘My Way’ by Frank Sinatra while my hosts and fellow travellers encouraged me. We sang a popular Singaporean song titled ‘Chan Mali Chan’ and agreed to sing it together at the APKASS Congress talent evening with the rest of the Singapore delegation.

The menu was filled with Singapore fusion, offering a multi-cuisine experience; Indian food was mixed with Chinese food, which provided an interesting mix of Indian spices with Chinese staples. It was a perfect culinary representation of Singaporean...
diversity. We bid farewell to our hosts who we would soon meet again at the APKASS congress. On my way to the airport, I noticed I was missing some of my belongings and the driver kindly returned to the hotel so I could retrieve them, demonstrating the kindness I experienced from Singaporeans during my visit. We then departed for our next destination, Bangkok, Thailand.

Thailand: a beautiful adventure

The activities in Singapore left me spent; nevertheless, I was excited to arrive in Bangkok, Thailand. We were transferred to our temporary home, the five-star Sukosol Hotel, courtesy of the Thai Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine. After a brief rest, we were greeted by our hosts Dr Pisit Lertwanich and Dr Jida who took us to an authentic Thai restaurant and we learned more about one another.

The following day we went to Siriraj Hospital, which is the oldest and largest hospital in Thailand and used by the royal family. We spoke at the LCP Cinco Claves conference (Fig. 6) about our work, we hosted a question and answer session and finished with a group photo.

We were transported across the river to visit the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, located at the Grand Palace (Fig. 7) and the Siriraj Medical Museum which included an exhibit dedicated to the 2004 Tsunami.

At the end of our tour we received a Thai massage courtesy of our Thailand hosts, which rejuvenated us after our Singapore trip and our walk around Bangkok. That evening, our hosts from the Orthopaedic Service of Siriraj Hospital invited us to dine with them at a Thai restaurant in Bangkok Noi District.

We visited Dr Nathaporn Saengphet at the Ramathibodi Hospital on the second day. We had the opportunity to watch the doctors perform surgery on a patient with shoulder instability using the Arthrex Arm and then an LPF medial repair with a novel hose system that connects to a sterile metal container with the arthroscopic solution, which is used in different arthroscopic surgeries (Fig. 8). We ate lunch in the hospital and attended another surgery before visiting the Chatuchak Market and trying the classic Thai sweet sticky coconut rice with mango for dessert and also the amazing fruit durian (Fig. 9).

That evening, we took the subway to the Phaya Thai district and ate dinner at Samsen Nai District with Dr Obb and his medical residents. After we had eaten our fill of Asian fusion, we travelled back
particular interest to me was the Chula Knot, which is a novel surgical technique for arthroscopic shoulder repairs (Fig. 10).

Hong Kong: a unique city and an unforgettable congress

We arrived enthusiastically in our final destination: Hong Kong. We stayed at the Regal Riverside Hotel near the Prince of Wales Hospital, where the APKASS congress would be hosted. That evening we attended a dinner hosted by the European Society for Sports Traumatology, Knee Surgery and Arthroscopy 2016 Fellows, including Dr Paolo Arrigoni (Italy), Dr Johannes Barth (France), Dr Brian Devitt (Ireland), Dr Mustafa Karahan (Turkey) and our Hong Kong hosts and organisers, Dr Patrick Yung (current president of APKASS) and Ms Coco Cheung (our logistics guide) (Fig. 12).

After a delicious meal with fantastic company, we exchanged gifts and took photos, before going to explore the city. We took the historic and over a century old Peak Tram to the famous Peak, which overlooks the entire city. Once again, we were reminded of the kindness of Asian people, when someone offered to share their cab to the city centre when we were unable to find a cab for ourselves (Fig. 13).

The following day we visited Macau where we took a tour of the city, visited the Performance Lake at Wynn Palace and had dinner in a traditional restaurant (Fig. 14). We celebrated the birthdays of Dr Rivarola and ESSKA’s Dr Karahan with the owner of the restaurant. After our long adventure in Macau, we needed a long rest to prepare us for the APKASS congress which would begin the following day. We travelled to the Prince of Wales Hospital early the next morning with the other SLARD and ESSKA Travelling Fellows. Experts in the field discussed their expectations for the orthopaedic
field in the section titled “A Look Into The Future Of Our Profession - What Is My Prediction Of The Top Story In 2021”. Prof. Kai-Ming Chan and Prof. Patrick Yung moderated the discussion and our Singaporean host, Dr Hui participated amongst others, such as Dr Freddie Fu and Dr Bruce Reider. After this remarkable discussion we attended the various talks and presentations on novel orthopaedic research by professionals in the field.

That first evening, we attended the Presidential Dinner with some of the highest ranking orthopaedic specialists, such as Prof. Kurosaka who developed the tibial fixation screw for ACL reconstruction (Fig. 15). He then delighted us with his rendition of ‘Hey Jude’.

I woke up nervous but excited for the second day of the conference, as I was to present my own work that day. I was eager to present my own work titled “ACL: Anchoring System” and I was
proud to demonstrate what we are currently doing in Ecuador (Fig. 16). The session focused on the SLARD and ESSKA Travelling Fellows and the sponsors presented a summary of both the scientific and social interests that were shared by all present. We then had the opportunity to then share our own experience with those present.

That evening we attended the APKASS Gala Dinner which included a talent portion. The dinner and company were both amazing and I got the opportunity to speak to the current Editor-in-Chief of the American Journal of Sports Medicine, Dr Bruce Reider (Fig. 17). As promised, we joined our Singaporean hosts to sing the song ‘Chan Mali Chan’ (Fig. 18).

As I packed the following morning, I took a moment to reflect on my journey, what I had learned, witnessed, experienced and most importantly, the people I met. I will never forget the wonderful
opportunities given to me by the SLARD-APKASS Travelling Fellow Scholarship. The final moment of this journey was to share our South American straw hats with my hosts, who presented Chinese hats to us in return (Fig. 19).

As the first Ecuadorean female specialist in the field of knee and arthroscopy, I feel like a pioneer who has been awarded a unique experience. It has taught me that we must be attentive and participate in everything that life gives us the opportunity to be at the forefront of science. As the trip came to an end, I was reminded that movement is life, life is movement.

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