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HKU/SICOT FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE in SPINE SURGERY

Introduction

My three-month HKU/SICOT Fellowship in the HKU Spine Division (from Jan 2026 to April 2026) was an enriching period of focused clinical training, academic exposure, and personal growth. Under the guidance of the Expert and renowned faculty of Spine division of HKU Ortho and traumatology, I gained practical and up-to-date skills in managing a wide spectrum of spinal pathologies.

Preparations & Arrival

Administrative coordination by **Ms Alison Sin** ensured a smooth transition. She assisted me in securing my visa and accommodation while also arranging hospital access. She also helped in timely notification of various information regarding the department events throughout my stay along with convenient arrangement of the stipend. **Ms Hester Wong** was nice enough to welcome me in DKCH and assist me in immediate integration into clinical duties.

The HKU Spine Team

I had the privilege of working with an outstanding multidisciplinary team—consultants, residents, nurses and allied staff—whose expertise and teamwork created an excellent learning environment. Under the guidance and mentorship of **Prof. Jason Cheung, Dr. Kenny Kwan and Dr. Paul Koljonen**, I was exposed to an advanced, high-volume spine center that emphasized innovation, precision and evidence-based practice centered around utmost patient care. I had the privilege of working alongside an exceptional team, including **Dr Graham Shea, Dr Chris Tang and Dr WY Cheung**. The Resident doctors in the spine division **Dr Isaac Khoo and Dr Raymond Kwok** along with other co-fellows were of immense help enough throughout my clinical experience in the division.

Clinical Experience

- *OPDs:* Regular outpatient clinics with longitudinal follow-up of patients with degenerative, deformity, trauma, infection and oncologic spine conditions enriched with cased based discussions with the faculty.
- *Grand Rounds:* Active participation in Wednesday and Friday Grand Rounds engaging in

multidisciplinary discussion.

- Perioperative and Postoperative Conferences: Weekly Friday pre-op and post-op discussions and Wednesday departmental meet focusing on surgical planning, risk stratification and outcome review.
- Scoliosis Care: Structured training in scoliosis evaluation and management, adopting a systematic, evidence-based approach and gaining familiarity with the school scoliosis screening program.

Operative Experience

Extensive OT exposure in observing and actively assisting in varied spine procedures under supervision. Hands-on experience included conventional and complex decompressions and fusions, deformity corrections and instrumented constructs. I observed and participated in cases using recent advancements such as navigation systems, robotic-assisted techniques and vertebral body tethering (VBT), enhancing my technical repertoire and decision-making.

Academic Engagement & Research

Extensive OPD discussions on the new and follow up cases, grand rounds and weekly case discussions broadened my clinical perspective. I also got an opportunity to conduct research (ongoing) under **Professor Jason Cheung** with help from **Research Assistant Professor Ms Prudence Cheung** strengthening my academic skills and appreciation for evidence-based practice.

Student Village & Social Life

Living in Student Village provided comfortable accommodation and enriching cultural experience. Participating in meet-and-greet events, high-table dinners and informal gatherings along with Experience-sharing session with the Uni Students deepened my understanding of academic life in Hongkong and allowed meaningful cultural exchange with the HKU students. It was very convenient for me to travel from Kennedy town to the workplace (QMH and DKCH) and back. I took full advantage of my time in Hong Kong, immersing myself in its diverse culture, breathtaking hiking trails, and sightseeing opportunities. The city's efficient public transport system made exploring easy, and the warm hospitality of my colleagues made my stay even more enjoyable.

Reflections on Learning

This fellowship has definitely refined my approach to spine patient assessment, perioperative planning and postoperative care in more systematic and evidence-based way. Exposure to scoliosis management and advanced technologies and procedures like navigation, robot and VBT has opened up

the possibilities for me to adopt contemporary and updated patient-centered strategies in my practice.

I would especially like to mention few golden words of the mentors among many which would remain for life with me.

Prof Jason – *“It is rare for a spine surgeon to see a beating heart in the procedure” (in the context of VAT- VBT)*

Dr Kenny Kwan – *“The dissection should be right on periosteum and never through the muscles to decrease the blood loss” (in the context of dissection in the OT)*

Dr Paul Koljonen – *“You are a performer showing your knowledge while presenting in the rounds” (in the context of effective presentations in front of experts and colleagues)*

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the HKU Spine Division faculty for their exceptional teaching and mentorship which is definitely a milestone for me in my path to becoming a Spine Surgeon. It was a best exposure an early career surgeon would wish for. The faculty ensured every time that my time over here was fruitful and a wholesome learning experience. I am deeply grateful and will always be indebted to them for their kindness and consideration. Heartfelt thanks also to the residents and co-fellows for their support, teamwork and camaraderie throughout the fellowship.

Final Thoughts

The HKU/SICOT Spine Fellowship was professionally transformative and personally fulfilling. The clinical skills, academic insights and collaborative values acquired here to improve patient care would definitely be reflect in my practice from now on. I hope to get to again work and learn from the faculty in the future too to be able to continue as well as contribute to the ever-evolving spine research and education.

With gratitude,

Prakrit Chhetri


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