Ashley Iain Simpson

Perth Sports Surgery Fellowship: Jan 2022 – August 2022

'The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind' **– Khalil Gibran**

The Perth Sports Surgery Fellowship was for me the culmination of a long and rigorous Orthopaedic Training Programme that began within the historic walls of St. John's College, University of Cambridge as a medical student. It was during these formative years that a passion for sport combined with a growing interest for the pathologies that affected the musculoskeletal system started me on a pathway to become an Orthopaedic Surgeon subspecialising in Sports Surgery.

As my higher surgical training as a Specialist Registrar progressed in London, England, I began to identify international Sports Surgery fellowships that offered training in advanced techniques in soft tissue reconstruction of the shoulder and knee with a strong focus on independent practice. This led me to the Perth Sports Surgery Fellowship, a fellowship with an excellent reputation, based on discussions with numerous previous fellows, and with an enviable geographical location.

Having briefly crossed paths with Dr Pete D'Alessandro during his fellowship with Mr Andy Williams in London, England in 2014, I organised to visit him in Perth at the end of my holiday to East Asia in 2019. Following a long discussion over coffee at the end of a busy Friday morning Sports Trauma Clinic, I was convinced that this fellowship would not only fulfil my aspirations as a Sports Surgeon but also provided an excellent fit for my lifestyle. In early 2020, an early morning virtual interview with Dr D'Alessandro and Dr Li-On Lam encompassing some challenging clinical discussions lead to my selection on to this prestigious fellowship.

I arrived into Perth in early 2022, having recently completed my orthopaedic training and subsequent 4 months as a Trauma & Orthopaedic Consultant in London. Being in the midst of the Covid pandemic, I spent one week quarantining in the 40˚ Perth summer before stepping into the operating theatre on Day 1 as the supervised primary surgeon in a multi-ligament knee reconstruction. It was immediately obvious that the complex and 'rare' cases I had been exposed to in the UK were common practice here and that my operative exposure would be second to none. This was further confirmed by my logbook at the end of the fellowship which demonstrates a volume and breadth of cases and procedures that would be unobtainable in many healthcare systems.

Early on in the fellowship I was rewarded with independent operating lists with full control over list planning. I was able to focus these lists on procedures with which I wanted to build my experience. The supervisors were happy to discuss cases in depth prior to the lists and ensured they were always available for support if required. I am extremely grateful to Andrew Zed and Glen Paisley, the industry representatives who ensured they were in attendance at all lists and made sure my nutrition requirements were always met.

In addition to the unrivalled operative experience was the exceptional welcome I received from the fellowship supervisors, Dr Pete D'Alessandro, Dr Li-On Lam, Dr Sat Gohil and Dr Brendan Ricciardo, and the ongoing mentorship they continue to provide. Special thanks go to Dr Pete D'Alessandro who ensured that I settled into Perth life and that I found solace in the woeful season of the West Coast Eagles AFL team, with regular tickets to Optus Stadium.

In my final week of fellowship, I was fortunate enough to provide outreach orthopaedic services on the Southern Ocean coastline of Western Australia, in Esperance with Dr Ricciardo. This is an area of outstanding natural beauty with white sand beaches, clear waters and exceptional surf. This will be an experience that stands out in my fantastic memories of the fellowship.

To summarise, 'there is no such thing as a bad fellowship', however to find one as exceptional as this is very rare. I could not recommend this fellowship to a greater extent. I believe I have received training in the full complement of shoulder and knee sports surgery and that I am now competent to provide a high-level sports surgery service to both the general public and the elite athlete alike. This outcome is purely down to the dedication and enthusiasm that the supervisors bring to this fellowship. Not only will this fellowship be one of the defining moments in my orthopaedic career, I have also gained a group of friends and colleagues who will play an important role in my life long into the future.

I can assure you that this fellowship is not just a 'tick box exercise' for your CV, but a lifestyle choice for the dedicated orthopaedic surgeon who wishes to develop the skills to manage an accomplished Sports Surgery Service. This fellowship is a Gamechanger!