

# THE ORTHOPAEDIC FORUM

## The 2019 Austrian-Swiss-German Traveling Fellowship

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**Abstract:** The Austrian-Swiss-German (ASG) Traveling Fellowship was established over 40 years ago as an annual exchange program between the English-speaking countries of the United States, Great Britain, and Canada and the German-speaking countries of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. In 2019, 4 German-speaking consultant orthopaedic surgeons represented their national societies in this unique and prestigious fellowship program: Karlmeinrad Giesinger from the St. Gallen Hospital, sponsored by the Swiss Society of Orthopaedics and Traumatology; Boris Michael Holzapfel from the Julius-Maximilians University in Wuerzburg, and Georgi Wassilew from the Greifswald Medical University, both sponsored by the German Society for Orthopaedics and Traumatology; and Martin Thaler from the Medical University of Innsbruck, sponsored by the Austrian Orthopaedic Association. This article describes the 2019 ASG Traveling Fellowship.

The Austrian-Swiss-German (ASG) Traveling Fellowship was initiated in 1979 as a yearly fellowship program for 4 established consultant orthopaedic surgeons from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland to provide the unique opportunity to visit the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. Since 1998, fellows from those English-speaking countries also have been selected to represent their national societies abroad. Since then, in odd-numbered years, the German-speaking delegation has been sent to the English-speaking countries. The program is coordinated by the American, the British, and the Canadian Orthopaedic Associations (the AOA, the BOA, and the COA). Vice versa, in even-numbered years, English-speaking fellows are sent to the German-speaking countries in Europe. There, the fellowship is hosted by the Austrian, German, and Swiss Societies for Orthopaedics and Traumatology.

In 2019, 4 consultant orthopaedic surgeons were chosen to represent their national societies. The first member of our group was Karlmeinrad Giesinger, a knee surgeon from St. Gallen, Switzerland, who specializes in total knee arthroplasty, knee trauma, and outcome research and was sponsored by the Swiss

Society of Orthopaedics and Traumatology. Next was an adult reconstructive surgeon, Boris Michael Holzapfel from Würzburg, Germany, who specializes in revision knee and hip arthroplasty and musculoskeletal oncology. The third member of our group was Georgi Wassilew from Greifswald, Germany, who specializes in hip revision surgery and joint-preserving surgery of the hip. Both Dr. Holzapfel and Dr. Wassilew were sponsored by the German Society for Orthopaedics and Traumatology. Last, but not least, was Martin Thaler from Innsbruck, Austria, a specialist in minimally invasive hip arthroplasty, hip revision arthroplasty, and musculoskeletal tumor surgery, who was sponsored by the Austrian Orthopaedic Association.

For more than 40 years, 186 ASG fellows have been recruited by their national societies and sent to other countries in order to support international academic exchange, encourage their leadership skills, foster their professional network, and—in the best cases—find friends for life. A large number of former ASG fellows are currently holding or have held university chair positions in their home countries. Therefore, the ASG fellows represent a highly selected leadership circle within

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the different national orthopaedic societies. Thus, ASG fellows are considered opinion leaders in the German-speaking countries. Fittingly, weeks before the start of our fellowship, a fellow from our group, Georgi Wassilew, was appointed Department Chairman and Professor of Orthopaedics at the University of Greifswald in Germany.

### The 2019 ASG Fellowship

The fellowship started in London on May 27, 2019, and ended on June 30, 2019, in San Diego. Our itinerary included visits to 11 different academic centers in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States and included 14 international and national flights. The majority of our destinations were located in the Midwest of the U.S.

### The U.K. Tour

#### London

On May 27, we were warmly welcomed in London by Deborah Eastwood, appointed trustee of the BOA and University College London (UCL) Professor of Pediatric Orthopaedic Surgery at Great Ormond Street and the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospitals. Deborah Eastwood specializes in pediatric orthopaedics and, during an insightful visit that culminated in a wonderful dinner, we were able to discuss the pros and cons of nationwide and focused neonatal hip screening programs, among other topics.

#### Oswestry

The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital (RJAH) in Oswestry, which is located close to the Wales border, was our second destination. Sir Reginald Watson-Jones spent a large share of his occupational life at the RJAH, from where he popularized his approach to the hip joint. Our host was Robin Banerjee, who specializes in revision hip and knee replacement. We went to the operating room with Mr. Richard Spencer Jones to watch primary total hip arthroplasty (THA) via posterior approaches and total knee arthroplasty (TKA) revisions. After 2 days in Oswestry, including complex case presentations with Mr. John-Paul Whittaker and Mr. Sudheer Karlakki, we had an in-depth discussion about postoperative wound treatments in obese patients, an increasing problem in our society. We then continued our journey and traveled to Stanmore.

#### Stanmore

The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Stanmore (greater London area) was our second stop during our U.K. tour. Our host there was Mr. Craig Gerrand, who runs the musculoskeletal oncology unit at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital. The hospital was established in 1905, and during World Wars I and II, it was entrusted with the care of military patients. After both world wars, the hospital was also responsible for the ongoing care of discharged and disabled soldiers. We observed a case of resection of the proximal part of the tibia in a patient with sarcoma, with consequent endoprosthetic reconstruction. We also were able to participate in a TKA case with Professor John Skinner, which was performed using patient-specific instru-

ments. Professor Skinner, Director of the Research and Innovation Center at Stanmore, and Mr. Harry Hohti introduced us to the most recent findings of their extensive retrieval analyses of various types of TKA and THA implants.

### The U.S./Canada Tour

#### Iowa City, Iowa

On Saturday June 1, we headed across the Atlantic Ocean from London to Chicago. On the following day, we took a wonderful car ride to our first stop in the U.S., the University of Iowa in Iowa City. We were welcomed by Professor Joseph A. Buckwalter IV and J. Lawrence Marsh, Chairman and Professor of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation and former ASG fellow. Together with Michael Yaszemski from the Mayo Clinic, he formed the first U.S.-ASG fellow group back in 1998. Over the next 1 and a half days, we had an extensive academic exchange about approaches to the hip joint, risks of surgery in obese patients, and, of course, clubfoot therapy as Ignacio Ponseti developed his world famous and highly successful method of nonoperative clubfoot treatment at the University of Iowa. We also observed several thrilling arthroplasty cases; one of our highlights was the lecture by Charles R. Clark, JBJS Deputy Editor, about publishing in *The Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery*. The university facility houses a huge gait analysis laboratory, which we had the chance to visit. At the University of Iowa's Human Performance and Clinical Outcomes Laboratory, researchers are studying devices to help military veterans and civilians who have sustained limb trauma. We were delighted to go to the property of and meet J. Lawrence Marsh's brother-in-law, an owner of a large farm in Iowa, where he gave us insight into the logistics and business of corn and soybeans. We set off early in the morning on Wednesday, June 5, by car and then plane to Kalamazoo, Michigan.

#### Kalamazoo, Michigan

We were welcomed by Keith Kenter, Chair and Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at the recently founded Homer Stryker MD School of Medicine at Western Michigan University. That afternoon, we were given a tour of the academic campus, followed by profound academic discussions with Dr. Joseph K. Weistroffer about the challenge to form exceptional clinicians, leaders, educators, advocates, and researchers. During the next 2 days, we had outstanding meetings with the Assistant Dean, the manager of the School of Medicine at Western Michigan University, and the hospital staff, which helped us to understand the differences, advantages, and disadvantages of health-care providers in Europe and the U.S. We had the opportunity to visit 2 hospitals, Borgess Medical Center and Bronson Methodist Hospital, to watch surgeries (among them a robotic-assisted TKA) before visiting the impressive manufacturing site of the Stryker Corporation. The next day, we participated in a scientific meeting with students and scientific staff, presenting our fields of research and listening to fascinating presentations, especially in the field of tissue engineering. Our time in Kalamazoo ended with a visit to South Haven, where we were able to enjoy the natural beauty and magic of Lake Michigan. At his

lovely home, Keith Kenter hosted a phenomenal barbecue party with the entire faculty—a very special honor for us that will remain in our memories.

#### *Rochester, Minnesota*

On Saturday, June 8, we arrived at Rochester International Airport, where we were greeted by Dr. Ahmad Nassr, who had been an ASG fellow in 2014. The next day, he and his wife invited us to have breakfast at their lovely home, followed by a visit to a beautiful waterfall and some thrilling and very competitive go-kart driving. We ended the day with a wonderful Brazilian dinner in Minneapolis. The next morning, each of us gave our lectures at Grand Rounds at the Mayo Clinic. The rest of the day was filled with arthroplasty procedures and tours of the impressive Sports Medicine Center, the Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center, and the large Motion Analysis Laboratory. In the afternoon, we were able to attend Dr. Mathew Abdel's cadaver laboratory, where he and his team provided an interesting insight into their most recent research about knee extensor apparatus reconstruction after multiple TKA revisions. In the afternoon, we presented our social talks, which included information about the history of the University of Wuerzburg, Tyrol, the heart of the Alps, and the consumption of black medicine (coffee) by doctors across all medical fields. In the evening, we had a delightful dinner with some of the faculty, including Professor Michael Yaszemski. On Tuesday morning, we departed via Chicago O'Hare International Airport to our next destination, Omaha, Nebraska.

#### *Omaha, Nebraska*

On Tuesday, June 11, we were welcomed by the 2010 ASG fellow Dr. Susan Scherl, a professor at the University of Nebraska, who specializes in pediatric orthopaedic surgery and trauma. To add variety to our stable diet of excellent Midwest steaks, we visited a German restaurant in Omaha. The following day, we had the great opportunity to give our presentations at Grand Rounds at the Lauritzen Outpatient Center, followed by a clinical tour through the University of Nebraska Medical Center. In the afternoon, Dr. Scherl organized a behind-the-scenes tour for us at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo. There, we had the unique opportunity to take an up-close look at zebras and rhinoceroses, followed by dinner at a very nice Italian restaurant. The next morning, we visited the Lauritzen Gardens at the Omaha Botanical Center before receiving a tour of the Biomechanics Laboratory with Hani Haider at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. We were very impressed by his expertise in the simulation and testing of orthopaedic implants and the in-house research into navigation systems for TKA. On Thursday, June 13, we flew once more via Chicago to Memphis, Tennessee.

#### *Memphis, Tennessee*

After arriving in Memphis, we were truly honored to stay at the Peabody Hotel, which is well known from Hollywood movies and is famous for its marching ducks. The duck march was inaugurated nearly 90 years ago and had been started most likely after 1 or 2 glasses of whiskey that prompted the former

hotel manager and a friend to place living ducks in the beautiful fountain of their hotel after returning from a hunting trip. The reaction of their guests was so enthusiastic that it has remained a tradition to let ducks march into the fountain twice a day in the hotel lobby. In Memphis, we were hosted by Professor William Mihalko, who introduced us to the long traditions of the world-famous Campbell Clinic. Its founder, Dr. Willis C. Campbell, opened his first clinic in 1909. He established the first orthopaedic residency program, cofounded the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), and served as its inaugural President. On Friday, June 14, we participated in Grand Rounds and learned about necropsy retrieval analyses from Bill Mihalko, about the Campbell Clinic Foundation from chairman James H. Beaty, and about the history and editing process of "Campbell's Operative Orthopaedics" from charming Kay Daugherty. On Saturday, we had some downtime for the first half of the day, followed by an early dinner of traditional Memphis barbecue. Bill Mihalko had organized tickets for a Minor League Baseball game for us, and he had the difficult task of acquainting Europeans with the rules of the game.

#### *Houston, Texas*

Our next stop was Houston, where we arrived after connecting through Chicago on Sunday, June 16. The rest of the day was used for leisure and to explore the city. The next day, the entire faculty of the Orthopaedic Surgery Department of the University of Texas spent the entire morning with us for a truly interesting high-level academic exchange that was moderated by our cohort Joshua Gary. In the afternoon, we had the great opportunity to visit the MD Anderson Cancer Center and meet Professor Bryan S. Moon and Associate Professor Robert L. Satcher at an academic conference. After graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard Medical School, Robert Satcher was a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronaut before continuing his practice as a musculoskeletal oncology surgeon—a curriculum vitae that certainly left us impressed for the rest of the day. On Tuesday morning, we were able to observe THA and TKA procedures and were fascinated by very efficiently demonstrated robotic-assisted TKA and by the rare opportunity to observe a metal-on-metal hip resurfacing. Together with our host James F. Kellam, we enjoyed a very exclusive lunch at a rooftop restaurant. We experienced an impressive view over Texas Medical Center, which consisted of a jaw-dropping 54 medically related institutions, including 21 hospitals, 8 specialty institutions, 8 academic and research institutions, 4 medical schools, 7 nursing schools, 3 public health organizations, 2 pharmacy schools, and 1 dental school. This proved to us that everything is truly bigger in Texas. After joining the orthopaedic trauma symposium, Joshua Gary organized a wonderful dinner party with staff members for us at his lovely home, which marked the end of our very enjoyable stopover in Houston (Fig. 1).

#### *Montreal, Québec, Canada*

On Wednesday, June 19, we arrived in Montreal to join the 2nd International Combined Meeting of 3 orthopaedic societies:

the COA, the Canadian Orthopaedic Research Society (CORS), and the International Combined Orthopaedic Research Societies (ICORS). During the opening ceremony, Professor John Antoniou, President of the COA, personally welcomed all of the visiting fellows, including us. We were delighted to attend the social program of the meeting and have the opportunity to participate in the very interesting scientific program. The remainder of the weekend left us plenty of time for leisure, including walking tours through the city and preparations for the rest of our trip through the U.S. We took a flight back to Chicago on Saturday, June 22.

### Chicago, Illinois

In Chicago, we were cordially welcomed by Professor Terrance Peabody, Chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Northwestern University, who arranged a tremendous weekend for us with excellent dinners, a visit to the John Hancock tower, and a river cruise to explore Chicago's impressive architectural heritage (Fig. 2). After academic presentations on Monday, we went for a tour through the Northwestern University campus, the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, and the Simpson Querrey Institute for BioNanotechnology. In the afternoon, we participated in an educational meeting before we had an excellent dinner in downtown Chicago. On the following day, we were greeted by the entire department of Rush University Medical Center and presented our lectures. We were able to observe a variety of arthroplasty cases before getting a tour through the impressive Rush laboratories. Following this



Fig. 2  
Terrance Peabody and the ASG fellows at Northwestern University.

well-prepared program, we were surprised by a driver offering us a stretch limousine for the return ride to our hotel—early on during our trip, we had realized that ASG fellows were treated like kings, but this was really the dot on the “i.” That evening we had a delicious dinner with the entire faculty at GT Prime, which is ranked among the top 50 steakhouses in America. On Wednesday morning, we took a flight to San Diego, the last stopover of our tour.

### San Diego, California

On June 26, during the Opening Ceremony of the 128th Annual Leadership Meeting of the AOA, the American-British-Canadian (ABC) fellows, the Japanese Orthopaedic Association (JOA) fellows, the North American Traveling Fellows (NATF), and the ASG fellows were personally welcomed by President Professor Rick W. Wright and invited to the President's dinner. During the AOA meeting, we learned a lot about leadership skills, a core topic of the meeting, preparing us for our future academic and clinical careers.

With this amazing meeting, our tour had finally come to an end. However, in our minds, the journey is still at its beginning. During our trip, we were stimulated scientifically and clinically by so many of the outstanding people who we met. Prior to our journey, we would not have thought that this fellowship would be capable of broadening our horizons and personal perspectives to such an extent. Although expectations were high, they were clearly surpassed. There was one thing that all of our destinations had in common: the hospitality and cordiality of our hosts were deeply impressive.

Currently, humanity is facing a global health crisis unlike any that the 4 of us can remember. While our fellowship was characterized by the unique opportunity to have face-to-face contact with opinion leaders in the field of orthopaedic surgery and by the ever-growing feeling of a united world, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) compels us to abstain from personal contact. While this year's fellowship tour in Europe had to be canceled because of the virus, we urgently call for creative ways



Fig. 1  
The ASG fellows in Houston on their way to a dinner party.

to continue the ASG Fellowship in the future. Information technology (IT) solutions cannot be the sole method of establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. It is much easier to engage with peers and to build long-term and hopefully lasting relationships with face-to-face contact. Within this context, we cordially agree with Dr. Maya Angelou: "...people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

We sincerely thank our orthopaedic associations and all of our gracious hosts for giving us this once-in-a-lifetime experience. We will never forget how you made us feel. ■

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