Inter-institutional Travel Fellowships—a Need for the Young Surgical Oncologists

Rajesh S. Shinde¹ · Nam Kyu Kim² · Avanish Saklani¹

Received: 19 September 2017 / Accepted: 8 March 2018 / Published online: 15 March 2018
© Indian Association of Surgical Oncology 2018

To The Editor,

In concordance with the recent article published in the *Indian Journal of Surgical Oncology*—“Minimally Invasive Surgery for Rectal Cancer: Current Status and Future Perspectives” [1], I would like to share my experience at Severance Hospital, Seoul, South Korea, during my visit there as an international fellow in August–September 2017. The purpose of writing this letter is to share and emphasize the importance of inter-institutional exposure for the trainees during the early period of their career to help them in better understanding the field of their choice, to gain experience from senior faculties in different parts of the world, and to observe the different methods in surgical practice and philosophy behind them.

I would like to thank my mentor Dr. A Saklani at Tata Memorial Hospital, India, for emphasizing and persuading the need of such exposure and I would also like to thank Professor Nam Kyu Kim, colorectal services at Severance Hospital, for giving me an opportunity to work with them as an international fellow (Fig. 1). Severance Hospital is a 2500 bed state-of-the-art hospital in Seoul with six surgical robots, special robotic and minimally invasive simulation center for trainees, and continuous academic activities for trainees.

During my visit, I was involved in various activities of the colorectal unit such as surgeries, ward rounds, and academic meetings. I learnt advanced minimally invasive colorectal surgeries with attention to finer details of surgical anatomy and techniques such as complete mesocolic excision with central vessel ligation for colonic cancers and total mesorectal excision and sphincter-saving procedures for low rectal cancers.

Professor Kim always emphasizes and pinpoints the technical issues such as intra-op tumor localization, preservation of autonomic nerves during rectal cancer surgery, dealing with difficult pelvis, importance of intra-op colonoscopy and air leak test for anastomotic integrity, and difficulties encountered in post neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy rectal cancer patients. The Professor also persuaded me to improve my theoretical knowledge by suggesting relevant literature to read in colorectal surgery. I was also fortunate to observe other colorectal surgeons in the department like Prof. Hur, Prof. Lee, Prof Min, and Prof Jo, with whom I interacted on various aspects in colorectal cancer surgery to improve my understanding regarding the subject.

I also observed that South Korea has a very good national screening program for early detection of colonic and gastric cancers which leads to diagnosis of these cancers in early stages making upfront surgery possible with minimally invasive approach and very high sphincter-preservation rates [1], in contrast to India, where we encounter majority of the patients in advanced stages (50%—locally advanced, 28%—metastatic at presentation) [2], which reflect in lower utilization of minimally invasive approaches in treatment of these cancers. Also, centralization of cancer services along with national insurance policy for cancer treatment reflects in delivery of high-quality patient care in high-volume center like Severance Hospital.

As I am trained in complete gastrointestinal oncology at my native institute, I was interested to attend minimally invasive gastric and hepato-pancreaticobiliary surgeries for better understanding of these surgeries too. I was fortunate to attend Prof. Hyung for minimally invasive gastric surgeries and Prof. Yoon for hepato-biliary surgeries. Both professors were very cooperative and guided me time to time with their experience in the respective fields. During this visit, I also attended robotic introduction and simulation courses for understanding basics in robotic surgery; with the current technological advances, I feel every trainee must be exposed to these modalities early in their training programs. At last, I could attend the

✉ Rajesh S. Shinde
dr.rajeshinde@gmail.com

¹ Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai 400012, India

² Severance Hospital, Yonsei University of Health Sciences, Seoul, South Korea

Fig. 1 Colorectal team of residents and fellows with Professor Nam Kyu Kim (Centre)

international colorectal cancer research summit held in Seoul; this event was much more than an academic feast in my visit.

In the end, I would say this visit has profoundly enriched my knowledge in academic as well as in clinical surgery and given me new perspectives about career goals. It is of great importance for trainee surgeons to visit such centers, it keeps them motivated, who shall strive to reach technical skills and

academic knowledge at par with mentors from such institutes. Maybe in future, better cooperation between medical councils of both countries can unlock further training opportunities [3, 4]. After all, the aim of improving quality of surgery and knowledge is to improve survival and quality of life of cancer patients. I would strongly recommend such visits particularly in the early period of surgical career to my trainee colleagues, to improve their understanding in their field of choice and inter-institutional exchange of academic knowledge.

References

1. Cheong C, Kim NK (2017) Minimally Invasive Surgery for Rectal Cancer: Current Status and Future Perspectives. *Indian J Surg Oncol* 8(4):591–599
2. Baik SH, Kim NK, Lee KY et al (2008) Analysis of anal sphincter preservation rate according to tumor level and neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy in rectal cancer patients. *J Gastrointest Surg* 12(1):176–182
3. Patil PS, Saklani A, Gambhire P, Mehta S, Engineer R, de'Souza A, Chopra S, Bal M (2017) Colorectal cancer in India: an audit from a tertiary centre in a low prevalence area; (ahead of print). *Indian J Surg Oncol* 8:484–490. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13193-017-0655-0>
4. Tyler WK, Mir HR, Zlotolow DA et al (2015) The AOA-JOA 2014 exchange traveling fellowship: banzai and beyond. *J Bone Joint Surg Am* e22(1–6):97