

BSGE Travelling Fellowship

Report on clinical placement

Filippo del Ponte Hospital, Varese, Italy

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Host: Professor Fabio Ghezzi

by

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The Background

While attending the BSGE Annual Scientific Meeting, Edinburgh 2018, I attended Prof Ghezzi's lecture on techniques of performing total laparoscopic hysterectomies for large fibroid uterus through mini laparoscopy, and delivering the specimen vaginally. His work left me fascinated and opened my eyes to what can be achieved through laparoscopic surgery. In particular, I was intrigued to know how complicated surgeries were made possible with the help of basic laparoscopic instruments.

Eager to learn from Prof Ghezzi, I successfully applied for the BSGE travelling fellowship. Prof. Ghezzi was extremely helpful in arranging the paperwork enabling me to attend for two weeks at Filippo del Ponte Hospital Department of Gynaecology, University of Insubria, Varese, Italy.

The Trip

The city of Varese lies at the feet of Sacro Monte di Varese, part of the Campo dei Fiori mountain range. Varese is situated on seven hills and the city overlooks Lake Varese.

I arrived in Varese after a short flight from London Gatwick to Milan. From Milan, it was a scenic train journey to Varese. I checked into an apartment just a few minutes' walk from the hospital.

My experience

The Gynaecology department in University of Insubria is a world-renowned training centre for endoscopic surgery. It organises regular training sessions for international students in partnership and has a strong research and development team.

During my placement, my learning objectives were to observe the systematic approach to laparoscopic procedure, build on team working skills in theatre and to learn lateral pelvic wall dissection in complicated endometriosis surgery. I was also interested in laparoscopic myomectomy especially vaginal morcellation of large fibroids which evades the power morcellation issue.

On my first day, I was greeted by Professor Ghezzi and his team of senior residents. His fellows were helpful and welcoming. They shared various videos of different procedures performed by him.

There are 5 all-day gynae theatres every day of the week. As a tertiary referral centre, it treats many cases of complicated endometriosis and gynaecology cancers. Professor Ghezzi has 4 operating lists every week and performs approximately 1500 laparoscopic cases annually.

There were 3 integrated and well equipped operating theatres dedicated to gynaecological surgery.

I noticed that all the patients were fully prepared and transferred from their ward beds into Stryker surgical trolleys which were designed in a way that their top half could be

detached and mounted on a stand in theatre. This would prevent transferring patients and back injuries to the staff, reduce time between cases and thus improve theatre efficiency. Patient flow was immaculate with the next patient waiting outside the theatre avoiding the need for sending for the patient from the ward.

I found the whole team very welcoming to the international fellows despite the language barrier. Anesthetists, nurses and trainees were very tolerant to the fellows vying for the best views of the surgery!

As the days went by, I understood the basic principle of Professor's ideology which essentially was to keep everything simple and follow the same methodology for every surgery no matter how complex the case is.

I witnessed the most important principle of laparoscopic surgery being put to practice, every day. The team was the same every day. They were well versed with the equipment, draping, set up and trouble shooting for problems. It was a flawless, streamlined and efficient approach to every case.

All the staff anticipated every move of the surgeons and staff would float around, adjusting lights, opening, disposing equipment without any interruptions.

I witnessed many complicated surgeries involving complex endometriosis, gynaecological oncology procedures with external iliac and obturator lymph node dissections, Total Laparoscopic Hysterectomies for large uterus as well as Myomectomy for large fibroids.

I observed how effortlessly Prof. Ghezzi would remove large specimens including 8-10cm fibroids through posterior colpotomy and vaginal morcellation. All the fibroids post myomectomy would be delivered in an endo-catch type bag and removed with the same approach. All the incisions would be 5 mm and this would enable use of 5 mm camera interchangeably through various ports to allow upper abdominal adhesiolysis.

The highlight of my surgical experience was observing laparoscopic management of cervical ectopic pregnancy requiring temporary internal iliac artery ligation along with laparoscopic cervical cerclage. This was followed by vaginal evacuation of products of conception. I witnessed the enthusiasm in the whole gynaecology team as they patiently waited for the procedure to complete which was not till quite late in the evening.

Take home points

- Standardise approach: Streamlines the whole surgery and every member of the team is aware of the next step and there is no role for anticipation.
- Know your instruments: you do not require advanced disposable kit to do any complex surgeries.
- If basics are right nothing is unachievable by laparoscopic surgery.
- It was a real masterclass in doing the basics well, and that all the modern equipment may make surgery more efficient but will only augment, not replace, surgical dexterity.

Not all work

During my stay in Varese, my daughter and husband decided to surprise me with a short weekend visit. We decided to do day tour of Milan, visiting the famous Milan Cathedral. It was a day well spent within the hustle bustle of the city including the famous designer shopping arcades.

In conclusion

Prof Ghezzi was very approachable and helpful in coordinating & setting up my clinical placement. He was helpful throughout my stay. Without his support I would not have been able to gain a positive experience during my visit.

I achieved my objective in gaining a thorough insight of their systematic approach. I observed many endometriosis surgeries and laparoscopic procedures to gain a thorough understanding of the principles of approach to lateral pelvic wall.

I owe my gratitude to Prof. Ghezzi and his team and to the BSGE for funding such an enlightening experience which I am sure will stay with me throughout my career and improve my approach to the management of patients.

I highly recommend the placement to fellow BSGE members.

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