

## Report of the 2016 SRS Traveling Fellowship

Brice Ilharreborde, MD<sup>a,\*</sup>, Bangping Qian, MD<sup>b</sup>, Kota Watanabe, MD<sup>c</sup>,  
Keith D. Luk, MCh Orth, FRCSEd<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Pediatric Orthopaedic Department, Robert Debré Hospital, Paris Diderot University, AP-HP, Paris, France*

<sup>b</sup>*Spine Surgery Department, NanJing Drum Tower Hospital, ZhongShan Road 321, Nanjing, China*

<sup>c</sup>*Department of Orthopedic Surgery, Keio University, School of Medicine, 35 Shinanomachi, Shinjyuku, Tokyo, Japan*

<sup>d</sup>*Department of Orthopedics & Traumatology, 5F Professorial Block, Queen Mary Hospital, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*

The 2016 SRS Traveling Fellowship was the turn for fellows from the rest of the world to visit North America. Bangping Qian of China, Kota Watanabe of Japan, and Brice Ilharreborde of France, together with Keith Luk, the senior fellow from Hong Kong, embarked on a three weeks' trip across the America. More than 12 centers offered to host the fellows, and we chose four, beginning in the west coast and finishing off at the IMAST meeting in Washington DC on the east coast. We knew from the start that this trip will not only be exciting but also challenging in many aspects. We decided to share the responsibility of recording the activities at the different stops for compilation of this report: Kota for San Diego, Brice for Toronto, Bangping for New York and Philadelphia, and Keith would be the official photographer. The other important issue was

to make sure we didn't put on too much weight by the end of the trip. To do this, we all weighed ourselves at the luggage machine at the first airport (Fig. 1).

### San Diego: June 21 to 24

We arrived in San Diego in the evening, separately from Hong Kong, France, China, and Japan with different degrees of jet lag. When we entered our hotel rooms, we found a surprise—a welcome basket with a heartwarming message from the hosts. After we met each other for the first time at the hotel lobby, the fellowship started with a welcome dinner by Dr. Burt Yaszay.

Drs. Peter Newton and Burt Yaszay hosted us at the Rady Children's Hospital early the next morning. We saw the facilities including the EOS imaging system and observed two adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS) surgeries. In the evening we had dinner with the doctors of the Rady Children's Hospital at a restaurant by the harbor with a night view of San Diego.

We visited the Scripps on day 3, which is located just beside the sea and a golf course. We were impressed by the scenery and wondered whether the doctors would have any spare time to take advantage of the course (Fig. 2A). The host doctors were Dr. Behrooz Akbarnia and Dr. Greg Mundis. The surgery we observed was a case of adult spinal deformity treated by anterior column realignment (ACR) and posterior instrumentation and fusion. Because ACR has not yet been introduced in Japan till now, the technique was especially interesting for Kota. In the afternoon, we visited a very well-equipped NuVasive cadaver laboratory where we practiced the anterior approach surgery, including ACR. We also visited the San Diego Spine Foundation run by Dr. Akbarnia. That night we had dinner with doctors of Scrips and staff of the Foundation enjoying a sunset view of La Jolla.

The following morning, we made presentations at the Rady Children's hospital with Dr. Dennis Wenger in the audience. Actually, this was the first of the many

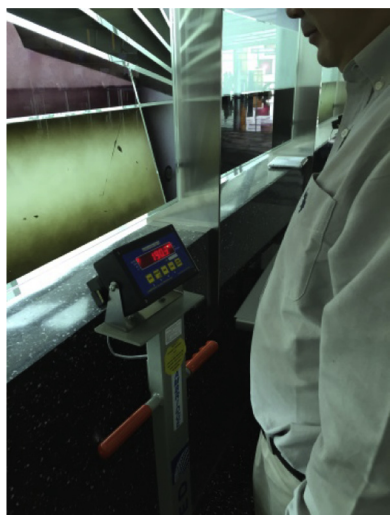


Fig. 1. Bangping on the scale.

\*Corresponding author. Pediatric Orthopaedic, Robert Debré Hospital, Paris Diderot University, AP-HP, Paris, France.



Fig. 2. (A) The Scripps. (B) SRS party at Burt Yaszay's home.

presentations in the traveling fellowship. Since then we have repeatedly presented our prepared topics at the different stops and of course with some improvement every time as we received interesting feedbacks along the way. It also gave us new inspirations for further research. In the afternoon, we went fishing with Burt and Greg. We spent abundant bait for fishing but we could only catch one fish of the same size as the bait. Bangping was not a good sailor but he recovered very quickly from the seasickness and enjoyed feeding the birds with the bait. We really enjoyed the excursion. In the evening, the doctors in San Diego held a farewell party at Burt's home for us. His house was located on a hill and commanded a beautiful view of the

sunset. The home party was truly great and filled with hospitality for the SRS traveling fellows (Fig. 2B).

### Toronto: June 25 to 29

On June 25, we left sunny California for a long plane ride that took us to Canada, where we were hosted by the University of Toronto (U of T) Spine Program (Drs. Michael Fehlings, Stephen Lewis, and Reinhard Zeller). The Park Hyatt downtown accommodation was very convenient to reach both the Hospital for Sick Children (Sick Kids) and Toronto Western hospitals (TWH). Immediately after our arrival, we received a warm welcome by Dr. Fehlings and his wife at the Annona restaurant, and were joined by Dr. Lewis.

The next day, a Sunday, Dr. Zeller took us on a tour of the Niagara Falls (Fig. 3A). We had lunch at the Peller Estates Winery, where we learned more about local wines from Ontario and had very interesting discussions about the comparison of our different health systems. We traveled back late in the afternoon and continued our journey to Dr. Zeller's house, where we enjoyed a wonderful French dinner with paired fine wines.

On Monday 27, we gave talks at the Sick Kids' morning rounds, followed by a tour of the facilities and the biomechanical laboratory with Karl Zabjek. In the latter, we were very impressed by the haptic model, developed to teach residents pedicle screw insertion. Thereafter, we joined Dr. Zeller's theater for an AIS deformity case, during which we talked about the thoracic concave derotation technique. In the evening, we were taken to Dr. Lewis's house where we were served a home-made dinner prepared by chef/surgeon Lewis and we chilled out by the pool while discussing the numerous international fellows attracted by the U of T Spine program (Fig. 3B).

On Tuesday, June 28, along with the TWH fellows (Drs. Pahuta and Kato) we provided talks and case presentations in the morning spine rounds, followed by an OR visit with Dr. Lewis. We observed a posterior fusion with five-level Ponte osteotomies and finally had lunch in Chinatown, to the great pleasure of Bangping. The day ended with a dinner meeting at the Faculty Club with further discussions and spine case presentations with all the local hosts and their fellows.

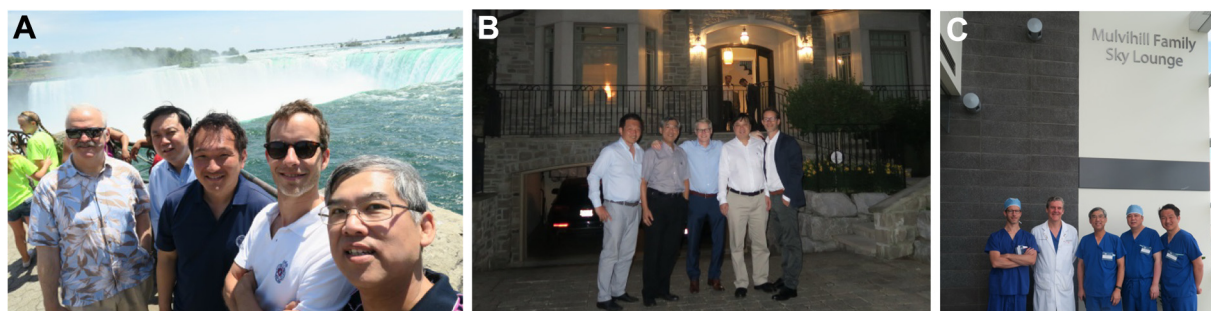


Fig. 3. (A) With Dr. Reinhard Zeller at Niagara Falls. (B) In front of Dr. Stephen Lewis's house. (C) The Fehlings Research building.

On Wednesday, June 29, we had our first chance to sleep-in as we needed to arrive at the TWH late in the morning and joined Dr. Fehlings and Dr. Lewis for complex spine deformity cases, including a three-column osteotomy. Dr. Fehlings later took us on a tour in the impressive Fehlings Research Lab (Fig. 3C), and took us in the evening to a farewell dinner at the CN Tower revolving restaurant, where we enjoyed a delightful company and breathtaking views of downtown Toronto and Lake Ontario.

### New York: June 30 to July 6

Our next stop, New York, was the longest and busiest. We had to get up at 4:00 AM in Toronto to catch the first flight out to New York aiming to arrive in time for the 8:00 AM course on “Conservative Treatment of Childhood Scoliosis” held at the New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center, organized by Dr. Michael Vitale. The most impressive lecture was “the psychological effects of AIS and bracing” presented by Dr. Stuart Weinstein. We then spent the whole afternoon at the downtown office of New York University (NYU) getting all the permits and security checks completed in preparation for the hospital visits in the following days. We met with Dr. Lawrence Lenke for a very nice dinner at the Mexicana Restaurant.

The next day, we met with Dr. Tom Errico at the NYU Hospital for Joint Diseases. Firstly, the traveling fellows made one presentation each in the hospital. We then proceeded to the OR at two different sites where we observed two surgeries: a neuromuscular scoliosis case by Dr. Errico and a revision surgery for adult degenerative scoliosis by Dr. Protopsaltis. After lunch, we visited the spine research

institute of NYU. Dr. Errico introduced the personnel structure of the lab and the progress of their current research projects. In the basement of the building was the private cellar of Dr. Errico, where we saw some of the most exotic and famous wines. We were told that his research students would be rewarded with a visit to the cellar (not the wine) only after they have successfully completed their project. In the evening, Dr. Errico hosted an excellent dinner at the Marea Restaurant for the fellows. Of course he also served us from his collection of the finest wines (Fig. 4A, B).

The following three days was a long weekend and the Independence Day holiday. This enabled us to see New York as a tourist and have some private time. On Saturday, Dr. Samuel Cho and Dr. Abigail Allen took us on the open-top bus tour to see the Big Apple, lunch at the Central Park, and visit the Mount Sinai Hospital (Fig. 4C), followed by a dinner/pool party at Dr. Cho’s house in New Jersey meeting his lovely young family.

The next day started with a wonderful cocktail reception at the beautiful apartment of Larry and Beth Lenke. After an early dinner at Gallaghers, we enjoyed an interesting and exciting Broadway show (Fig. 4D). A stroll through Times Square in the late evening verified that indeed, this city never goes to sleep.

July 4 was a completely free day when we enjoyed New York City in our own ways.

Day 6 was the busiest day. We arrived at The Spine Hospital (previously the Allen Hospital) in North Manhattan by cab at 6:00 AM to participate in a preoperative case conference, and each of us delivered one speech (Fig. 4E). After that, we observed a T8 vertebral column resection (VCR) for ankylosing spondylitis performed by Dr. Lenke. It was a wonderful procedure with very nice



Fig. 4. (A, B) Dr. Tom Errico hosted a fine wine dinner. (C) In front of the Mount Sinai Hospital with Drs. Abigail Allen and Sam Cho. (D) Broadway show with Dr. Lawrence Lenke and Beth Lenke. (E) The Spine Hospital conference. (F) Keith Luk, Todd Albert, and Banging Qian.

correction. We were impressed by Dr. Lenke's newly built OR, which he had modeled on St. Louis. Dr. Lenke also summarized the tips and tricks of VCR surgery at the postoperative case conference. In the evening, we joined the second "New York spine group dinner" at Dr. Todd Albert's home (Fig. 4F). During the dinner, Dr. Michael Vitale and Dr. Han Jo Kim showed one tough case each, and we learnt quite a lot from that.

The final day again started very early as we visited the Hospital for Special Surgery. We observed a cervical total disc replacement (TDR) surgery by Dr. Albert and a revision surgery for an adult degenerative kyphoscoliosis performed by Dr. Han Jo Kim. Unfortunately, we had to leave at 5:00 PM before the surgery was finished to catch the train to Philadelphia, aiming at arriving before midnight.

### Philadelphia: July 6 to 12

We managed to catch an early train at the Penn Station in New York; thus we still had time for a quick dinner in Philadelphia after a very long and full day.

Philadelphia was the last but another busy stop. On July 7, the day started at the Pennsylvania Hospital with a research symposium organized by our host Dr. Vincent Arlet, with more than 50 participants including attending doctors, residents, and medical students. The traveling fellows presented their papers, and each of their subjects was thoughtfully matched with a relevant research topic by a local faculty (Fig. 5A). After that, we visited the McKay Orthopaedic Research Laboratory for about one hour. Thereafter we observed an anterior lumbar fusion surgery performed by Dr. Arlet. It was interesting to see that Dr. Arlet had all the MRI images printed out on A4 papers and

hung on the four walls around his operating table. In the afternoon, we enjoyed a guided tour of the Pennsylvania Hospital. We visited the hospital museum and obtained a great understanding of the history and development of this "Nation's First hospital." Dinner was held at the Department Head Dr. Levin's residence.

The next day, we visited the Rothman Institute, beginning with a meeting with the CEO learning how the hospital was being run. We then joined the grand round and discussed the cases admitted the night before and the case to be operated on that day. We spent the rest of the morning observing Dr. Greg Anderson's surgery. Unfortunately, there was no CCTV in the OR, making it difficult for the fellows to follow the procedure. The afternoon was devoted to case and research discussions with the residents.

Day 3 was a Saturday. We started late with brunch at Dr. Arlet's house kindly prepared by him and his wife Anne. Vincent then guided us on a walking tour of the city visiting many interesting and famous scenic spots including the Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, the Barnes Foundation and Art Museum, etc. The most impressive part was running up the "Rocky Steps." We took photos in front of the Rocky statue as a record of the happy time together (Fig. 5B). Of course, the night ended with another great dinner, at the Le Cheri restaurant in Rittenhouse square.

On Sunday, we enjoyed a relaxing day at Greg Anderson's riverside house in Maryland. Besides the delicious food, we also had great fun boating down the river.

We spent our fifth day at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). We arrived at the hospital at around 7:30 AM and received a warm welcome from Dr. Patrick J. Cahill. After touring the extremely child-friendly hospital facilities, we watched two surgical demonstrations. One

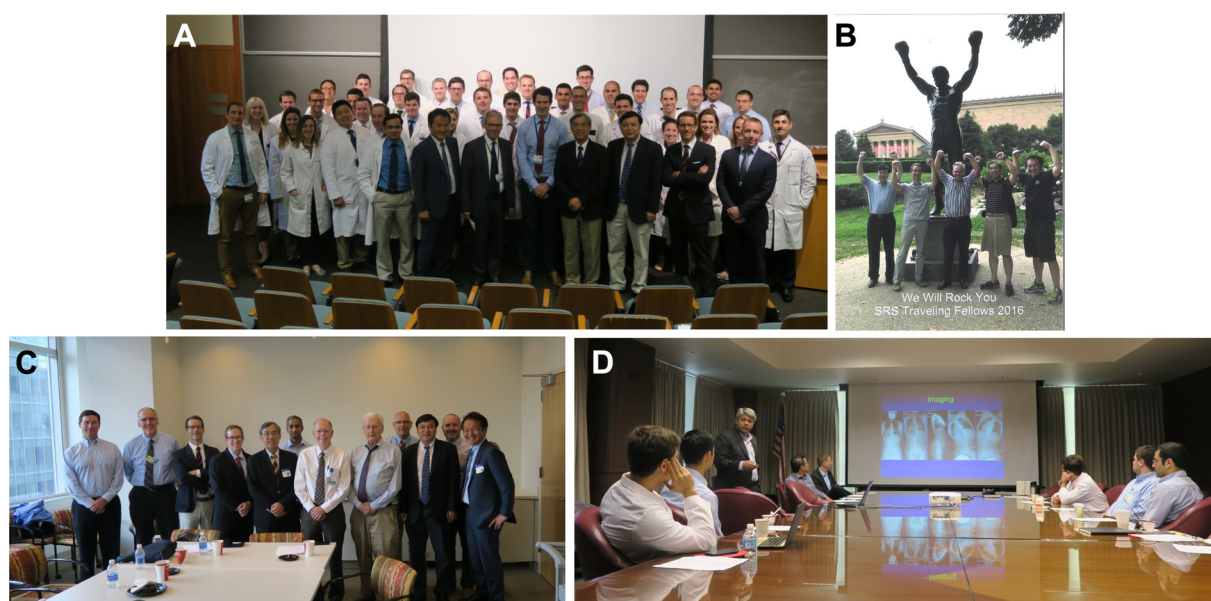


Fig. 5. (A) Morning symposium at the Pennsylvania Hospital with Dr. Vincent Arlet. (B) At the "Rocky Steps" with Dr. V. Arlet. (C) With Dr. Campbell and Dr. MacEwan at CHOP. (D) Dr. Amer Samdani discussing cases of anterior tethering.

was a VEPTR insertion demonstrated by Dr. Robert Campbell, the other was a posterior correction surgery for AIS with O-arm navigation performed by Dr. Jack Flynn. From 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, we attended a symposium with a large number of presentations. It was also a pleasure to meet Dr. Dean MacEwan. Dr. Robert Campbell introduced the history and future of VEPTR in detail. Subsequently, Dr. Divya Talwar and Dr. Malcolm Ecker introduced the overview of CHOP spine research and the history of spine surgery at CHOP, respectively. In addition, Dr. MacEwan delivered a speech titled “scoliosis screening and development of the Wilmington Brace” and gave us a lot of useful information (Fig. 5C). In the evening, Dr. Campbell and his wife Corey invited us to his house for a fantastic BBQ dinner, and we were so well fed indeed!

We visited the Shriners Hospitals for Children on the final day. As usual, we started with a morning conference, conducted by Dr. Amer Samdani (Fig. 5D). He then showed us the vertebral body tethering surgery for early-onset scoliosis. The case discussions resumed over a sandwich lunch, and each of the traveling fellows presented their papers for the last time on this trip.

At this point, the traveling fellowship was officially completed. It was time for us to say farewell to each other. Brice left for the airport to go home and Bangping went off to meet his family, who had flown in from China; Kota would leave for Tokyo on the next day, while Keith proceeded to the IMAST in Washington, DC. One thing we forgot to do before parting was to document our post-fellowship body weight.

Although challenging, the fellowship was indeed enjoyable and educational. We all agree that it was a lifetime experience. Not only have we four newly met fellows with different cultures and characters traveled so amicably together for three weeks, we have also made many new friends from different corners of the globe sharing our mutual passion in spine surgery together. I am sure this friendship will last for the rest of our careers. We want to thank the SRS for sponsoring the fellowship and the many people behind the scenes who have helped organize the program (special thanks to Lily Atonio). The most generous hospitality of our hosts would be difficult to reciprocate but we look forward to such opportunities if they come our way.