2015 APKASS to SLARD Travelling Fellowship Report

It was with great anticipation that Yong Seuk, Yi Lu, Warren Leigh and Eiji Itoi met in Mexico City. It was an honor to be selected as the first APKASS traveling fellows to SLARD touring to Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile.

We were met by Jorge Negrete and taken to our hotel. We arrived at our hotel after amazing traffic for a Sunday afternoon but we thought it was just the F1 Grand Prix, but we soon learnt that Mexico City was infamous for its traffic for a reason. We had a dinner with Ivan Encalada and Jorge.

While in Mexico City we attended a number of hospitals. We were based at Medica Sur but also spent time at Hospital Angeles, Trinidad and The University of Football at Pachuca. We observed arthroplasty and arthroscopy.

In Mexico we started surgery at 6:00am and the evening meeting with the Mexican Orthopedic Association finished after midnight. Our talks about the NZ Rotator Cuff Registry, PCL, elbow arthroscopy and the Glenoid track were very well received. A lot of interesting discussion was held among the local Mexican surgeons after our talks.

Our hosts were amazing. They showed us a true Mexican experience. We saw historic temples of the Sun and Moon dating back to BC. The Aztec stadium where Diego Maradona in 1986 famously used the hand of god to help guide Argentina to the World Cup victory was also a highlight. We were guests at the official opening of the first every University of Football in Pachuca where we observed surgery in their new state of the art operating facilities, that had only recently opened.

A highlight for us was the food. Amazing Mexican meals were enjoyed at Antigua Hacienda from 1837, an amazing traditional Mexican meal hosted by a local surgeon with a sommelier to compliment local wines, tequila with each meal that was expertly cooked by a chef. There was an impromptu Chili eating contest won by Yong Seuk (Champ). He then went on at one of the other functions to try and out eat Fernando the local champion. After a valiant and very hot contest, a draw was called. To celebrate Mescal was drunk.

Mexico City is a city on a vast scale. The traffic has to be experienced to be believed. The smog that is often reported was only severe on one day. Mexican food is spicy, fresh and also fascinating with ant eggs and insects on the menu. The Mescal and Tequila were fantastic, and surprisingly the local wines, blanco and roso were fantastic when matched to the local food.

All the fellows and the godfather look forward to further interaction with the SLARD, AMECRA and the local surgeons.

Sao Paulo was an amazing experience. Moises Cohen and Benno Ejnisman were brilliant hosts. From the moment we arrived until we left, we had organized activities and an array of hospital visits, surgical observations and social activities.

Moises and Benno were so generous with their time and showed us what an amazing city Sao Paulo was. We attended the Corinthians Stadium and watched a game including VIP access to watch the players warm up. The South American fans were the loudest and most vocal we have ever heard, and with no alcohol in the stadium it was the love of football that drove this.

There were countless lunches and dinners sampling an array of Brazilian dishes from beans and rice, to the typical Brazilian barbeque and a highlight was dinner at Moises residence sampling the best of Brazil, finished with Eiji playing the grand piano.
Presentations were given to the Sao Paulo Orthopaedic Department at the Federal University of Sao Paulo and also to the Sports Medicine Department and Sao Paulo Shoulder and Elbow Society.

We observed shoulder surgery with Benno and a day with Moises at Albert Einstein Hospital, which culminated in a visit to his Cohen Institute which has a complete range of rehabilitation facilities including his own television studio and arthroscopic practice laboratory. This was the best sports medicine facility we have visited.

We also met the gymnastics gold medalist Arthur Zanetti from the last Olympics, who had had a subscapularis repair and watched him training towards the Rio Olympics.

Next was off to Argentina where our first stop was Rosario with Daniel Slullitel. Rosario is 300 km north of BA on the Rio Panana. A beautiful city of tree lined streets and full of rugby loving surgeons. For a kiwi this was a great surprise in a football mad continent.

After arrival we went to the James Slullitel Institute and met with Daniel and his brother Miguel and had a shared meeting with presentations from the local faculty and our papers again. A good discussion ensued. Dinner was on the river eating the local river fish, with Argentinian Malbec, a very enjoyable evening.

The next day we observed some complex knee and shoulder cases with Daniel and was one of the surgical highlights as challenging cases were undertaken. He has used quadriceps tendon for over 10 years and a retroscrew in his ACL reconstruction which was a new technique for YS and Warren to see. He also had some good tricks to gain more operating space in GH joint when undertaking a Bankart repair. In return, YS showed his posterior-lateral portal for the ACL/PCL knee reconstruction.

The evening was dinner with the local hospital facility at a traditional steak house and sampling of Merlot from Mendoza.

The next day we went by car to BA. We were staying in the fashionable Pallermo district, full of bars, clubs and coffee shops. Dinner was at Guillermo Arce’s house and was a highlight for us. He hosted all the local surgeons from his department. The traditional Argentinian BBQ at Guillermo house was amazing with traditional meat and blood sausages and dulce de leche was amazing.

The next day we attended Surgery where Guillermo Arce’s undertook four shoulder cases and in the next door theatres were several instability cases and an ACL reconstruction and a tibial plateau fracture with other local surgeons.

The facilities at the hospital were of the highest quality. Rodrigo Maestu and Facundo Gigante were great hosts, with Rodrigo taking us to a Polo exhibition match after another amazing meat fest lunch. That evening we presented our papers to the Argentinian Arthroscopy Society before heading to a traditional Tango Show. A great night had by all.

The 4AM departure the next day was tempered by delays to the airplane at BA airport, so coffee, discussions and watching a huge thunder and lightening storm pass by before landing in Santiago and missing our connection. No sooner had we cleared customs and entered lift to head to check in to try and use our rudimentary Spanish to try and reorganize flights than Alex Vaisman was in the lift and said are you the traveling fellows. (a miracle!) In 2 minutes we were rebooked onto flights and we were off out of the airport into the next valley (wine region) to have a typical Chilean lunch with Alex and David Figueroa and their wives. Amazing how quickly things were sorted by Alex !

We arrived in La Serena the venue for the SCHOT meeting and after dropping our luggage we headed out to a Steak house for another beautiful dinner. The next day was an AAOS/SCHOT knee meeting.
We farewelled Eiji after lunch as he was headed back to Japan early for another speaking engagement. It was sad to see Eiji leave as we had become very good friends over the preceding 3 weeks.

Dinner at another steak restaurant, it was still a shock to us all how late South Americans eat dinner. 9 – 10 PM seems the usual time and even after 3 weeks we were still adjusting to it. The Pisco Sours that are the specialty of this area was a great Aperitif.

The tour to the Equi valley and pisco distillery the next day was 140 km from La Serena but it felt like entering a completely different environment, as it was very arid and dry yet contrasted by the vineyards everywhere growing the grapes for Pisco production. The theme of late dinners continued this evening and great conversations with local surgeons.

The next day was the SCHOT conference with a large number of talks which were of a high standard with a large international faculty and also very good translation services so not speaking Spanish did not limit our involvement in the meeting.

Our talks took place and a large discussion around the shoulder and knee presentations which was great. South American sports surgeons showed a great interest in our topics. Not only Chilean Surgeons but also by discussion, we exchanged a number of different ways to deal the same problem. These discussions were a highlight for the fellows. That night a BBQ on the 25th floor roof top was a lovely relaxed affair with all the surgeons from the Santiago group as well as residents which was a lot of fun.

The congress finished the next day and after the 5 km SCHOT fun run we boarded airplanes to return home. The fellowship exposed us to an amazing time in South America. Meeting like-minded surgeons in all the countries provided some great chances to interact. We all look forward to further interactions with these surgeons.

The variability in the food between countries and the amazing tastes we experienced will be a lasting memory for us all. Initially the large lunches, and very late dinners took some getting used to but by the end eating at 10 seemed a natural thing to do.

The fellows were impressed with the ability of the local surgeons in some countries to start an operating list at 6AM in the morning, yet were able to hold meetings lasting till after midnight on the same day and then get up and repeat the process the next day.

The discussions between the fellows and surgeons during the presentations and during surgical cases allowed us to gain insight into how different disorders are treated in these countries. On the whole the results were similar but there were interesting variations in how these results were reached.

The fellows also gained lots of insight into how the health systems of New Zealand, Japan, China and Korea function and how they address different orthopaedic challenges.

All the SLARD countries we visited treated us amazingly well and this was a life experience that will hopefully allow more collaboration between ourselves, and the surgeons of South America. Our thanks to Jorge Negrete, Ivan Encalada, Prof Moises Cohen, Benno Ejnisman, Daniel Slullitel, Guillermo Arce, Rodrigo Maestu, Facundo Gigante, David Figueroa, Alex Vaisman and all their fellows and residents for the most amazing time. Lastly we must thank Eiji for being a fantastic god-father, he made the trip a very memorable one with lots of laughs, lots of learning and a calm influence throughout.
Eiji, Yi, Yong Seuk and Warren with Ivan and Jorge on the first night of the fellowship

Discussing cases with Jorge and his team
Learning about the Temple of the Sun and climbing it

Touring the first University of Football in Pachuca
Eiji and the fellows learning about Brazilian Football at Corinthians

Eiji comparing muscles with Arthur the gymnastics gold medalist from the last olympics
The fellows with Moises and Beeno outside the University of Sao Paulo

Daniel and Miguel and the fellows after the presentations
Cruising with Daniel on the Rio Panana

Enjoying some football after dinner
The Fellows Enjoying a Tango Show

At the SCHOT conference in La Serena with David and Alex
At the completion of an amazing SLARD fellowship