

The Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract  
Board of Directors  
900 Cummings Center, Suite 221-U  
Beverly, MA 01915

May 14, 2007

Dear SSAT Board of Directors,

It was my honor and privilege to accept the 2006 SSAT Olympus Traveling Fellowship for Flexible Endoscopy. As a minimally invasive colorectal surgeon, I applied for this fellowship in the hopes of getting a glimpse into the future of minimally invasive surgery: natural orifice transluminal endoscopic surgery. For this reason, I chose to spend my fellowship with gastroenterologist Dr. Chris Thompson, and minimally invasive surgeon, Dr. Ashley Vernon, at the Peter Bent Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. Thompson was the first investigator to describe natural orifice surgery via a transcolonic approach.

I arrived in Boston for the third week of January and was greeted by the bitter cold of a New England Nor'easter which kept the temperatures in single digits all week. This could not chill my enthusiasm for the week ahead. The first half of my week was devoted to the hospital endoscopy suite. There I observed advanced diagnostic and therapeutic endoscopic techniques including polypectomies and wire, catheter and fluoroscopic directed therapies. Many of these patients had quite challenging post gastric bypass surgical anatomy which needed to be navigated and assessed for factors related to weight regain. Midweek I had a chance to see for the first time, the technique of endoluminal suturing used in these bariatric surgery patients to repair dilated gastrojejunostomy anastomoses. Dr. Thompson and his team functioned as a well oiled machine making these elaborate procedures appear second nature.

For the latter half of the week, we switched gears and moved into the basic science lab. Our focus was transcolonic NOTES procedures. I had a chance to see the vast array of procedures in development and work with prototype instrumentation which will help facilitate this evolving field. It is here where we spent a day collaborating with an Olympus design and engineering team and was able to thank their company first hand for the generous support of my fellowship.

Throughout my stay, I was most impressed at the collegiality and hospitality of my hosts. I felt welcome as a part of the research and clinical team. I was free to attend educational conferences, and spend time with other faculty, visiting physicians, and house staff. We freely exchanged ideas and had passionate exchanges regarding gastrointestinal endoscopy, surgery, and the future of NOTES. Fortunately, my relationship with this great team did not have to end following the all too short one week fellowship. We have since been able to continue on by starting collaborative projects between our labs on opposite sides of the continent.

I wish to thank both SSAT and Olympus for supporting me during this phenomenal opportunity. I also wish to acknowledge the hard work of Jon Blackstone from SSAT and Michelle Ryan, M.S., Clinical Research Coordinator at the Brigham and Women's Hospital for working with me to make this dream a reality.

Sincerely,

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Legacy Portland Hospital  
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