

My Experience as a 2023 POGO Scholar

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Introduction

In September 2022, I received an invitation to apply for POSNA's 2023 Pediatric Orthopaedic Global Outreach (POGO) Scholarship. I was thrilled when I was awarded sponsorship.

Arrival for the Observership

Dr. Corey Gill, my host at Scottish Rite for Children in Dallas, personally picked me up from the airport. The next day he took me on a tour of the hospital. I was amazed by the extremely beautiful and spotlessly clean hospital with bright, child-friendly colors and large, open recreational spaces. Everything in the hospital was designed with children in mind. Dr. Gill introduced me to the surgeons, registrars, and fellows. I also met Donna Williams who was my contact for any logistical issues. Everyone was so welcoming.

Settling into Work at Scottish Rite

With support and guidance from everyone, I was able to settle in very quickly. I discussed my learning objectives with Dr. Gill and Ms. Williams, and we developed weekly plans, which outlined the surgeries, clinics, and other activities that I would attend daily. To maximize my learning experience, I would normally watch one or two surgeries, attend a clinic or gait lab, and then go back to the OR for another interesting operation. The day usually ended with a discussion on upcoming and completed surgeries. Topics of interest, including limb reconstruction and gait analysis, were also discussed in these meetings.

I asked many questions and got involved as much as possible in everything that was taking place in the hospital. I watched the amazing teamwork as each surgery was executed, watching in awe the remarkable skills of the surgeons who were supported by the impressive teams of operating room personnel and industry representatives. I interacted with and befriended many industry representatives, such as those from OrthoPediatrics, and was amazed by the skills and equipment they brought to the operating room. I watched so many technical steps that were executed like a well-oiled machine, ranging from the rodding of long bones with nails precisely designed for children, to the correction of

severe scoliosis spines guided by navigation systems, to spine corrections that I could not imagine possible.

I watched the realignment of fractured/dislocated carpal bones with headless screws, pollicisation of a finger using operating microscopes, and realignment of skewed feet with allograft assisted by special spreaders that hold open the bones with minimum effort. I watched in amazement as peri 2 acetabular osteotomies covered dysplastic hips in real-time before being fixed. I also had an opportunity to watch the hip arthroscopic repair of a torn labrum. Each surgery seemed like a work of art functioning synchronously with science. I asked questions and scribbled the answers so that I could remember, and in the evening, I summarized all my notes for future reference.

In the clinics, I watched as every child and family was treated with dignity and respect. There was no rush; every surgeon listened intentionally and attentively, providing undivided attention, answering all questions, and planning the way forward. It was inspiring to see the multidisciplinary team approach to each child's problem. I watched surgeons have discussions at great length with nurses, neurologists, psychologists, and prosthetists, making sure nothing but the very best was done for every child. I was so impressed with the teamwork.

I also visited the Scottish Rite for Children Frisco Campus and watched sports surgeon Dr. Philip Wilson perform spectacular repairs of ACL and MPFL, using anchors, allografts, and screws.

Not All Work

Outside of the hospital setting, I was booked with activities on the weekends. I had to rely on a "first ask, first accept" basis for all the weekend invitations I received. I visited the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden with Dr. Harry Kim and had dinner with him and his wife, I visited the Fort Worth Stockyard Stables with Dr. Gill and his family. I even watched an ice hockey game with Dr. Gill and one of the fellows—I am glad Dallas won the game, with each goal sending the home supporters into a frenzy of pure joy!

One evening, Dr. Gill and I had dinner with Drs. John Birch, Charles Johnstone, and Tony Herring, who are giants of orthopaedics at Scottish Rite, and who regularly meet to maintain camaraderie amongst themselves. I was honored to be in the presence of these gentlemen.

It was a pleasure to join Dr. Jaysson Brooks and his extended family for Thanksgiving dinner. I had a lot of fun with them, learning more about this important American tradition.

On Sundays, I went to a multinational church where Dr. Karl Rathjen, one of the surgeons at Scottish Rite, was an elder. At the end of every service, I would get so many invitations for lunch. One Sunday, I had lunch at a Kenyan-run restaurant, and on another day, I had a mid-week dinner with Ugandan/Malawians living in Dallas.

Attendance at IPOS®

Before long, it was time to attend IPOS® in Florida, where there was much more to learn. There were many learning modalities used—case discussions, didactic lectures, panel discussions, expert opinions, arguments and counterarguments among leading surgeons, and even hands-on sessions like pinning elbows, casting vertical talus, etc. Listening to different views and approaches from experts provided such a great learning experience for the many complex advanced pathologies I see in Malawi. I was able to ask questions during some of the panel discussions, and I received many pearls of wisdom.

The talks were not only orthopaedic in nature, but some addressed other spheres of life—talks and discussions on Work-Life balance, financial knowledge for orthopaedic surgeons, leadership, listening skills, how to build one's career, etc. Surgeons were encouraged to become involved in activities outside their normal routine, such as medical missions and supporting orthopaedic organizations like the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA), a non-profit making professional body that fosters postgraduate education in surgery and provides surgical training throughout the East, Central, and Southern Africa region.

I was also amazed at the cutting-edge technology on display by the various industry partners in the exhibit hall. World-renowned pediatric institutions, like the Paley Institute, had tables where some of their publications were on display.

IPOS® was also a wonderful place for networking. I met many surgeons who were interested in Africa and expressed a desire to find ways to be involved with orthopaedics in the developing world. In the evenings, I would go for a jog around the many hotels and amusement parks in the area. Overall, everything about IPOS®, including the food, was an amazing experience.

Conclusion

I am extremely grateful to OrthoPediatrics for its support of the POGO International Educational Scholars Program and this opportunity; the POSNA administrators; Scottish Rite for Children, for all the logistical work; Dr. Gill and his family for being outstanding hosts; Dr. Amanda McCoy for encouraging me to apply for the POGO scholarship; the surgeons, medical workers, and industry representatives whom I met for teaching me so much and answering all my questions; my workplace, CURE Children's Hospital of Malawi; and my family, for permitting me to come.