

Inaugural Indigenous SET Scholar gets a French start

Ear Nose and Throat Trainee (ENT) Dr Andrew Martin last year attended the renowned G. Portmann Institute in France to complete a week-long course in temporal bone and middle ear dissection.

Dr Martin was an inaugural recipient of the RACS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SET Program Scholarship, designed to encourage more Indigenous doctors to pursue a career in surgery and supported by Johnson & Johnson Medical.

Dr Martin, a mid-level specialist Trainee in ENT at the Wellington Hospital and Hutt Valley Hospital in New Zealand, completed the course in June.

He said the course attracted ENT trainees and consultants from around the world and involved both simulation and live surgery at the Pellegrin University Hospital and the St. Augustine Clinic.

With an interest in Otolaryngology, Dr Martin listed the clinical highlights of the trip as conducting:

- Ossiculoplasty, a procedure to repair, reconstruct and improve the movement of the bones crucial to hearing in the middle ear, often damaged or immobilised due to infection or diseases such as otitis media or traumatic head injury;
- Stapedectomy surgery conducted to treat hearing loss caused by otosclerosis which causes conductive hearing loss through a build-up of bone around the stapes;
- Cochlear Implantation.

The G. Portmann Institute is one of the oldest schools of Otorhinolaryngology in Europe. For decades, it has conducted courses in English to teach post-graduate trainees from around the world new surgical techniques.

Dr Martin said it was the mix of practical skills-based learning and having the opportunity to mix with ENT trainees and specialists from a variety of countries that made the week such a valuable experience.

"It was a wonderful educational experience, not only in terms of skills acquisition but I also enjoyed learning about new developments in ENT and seeing different ways of tackling the same problem," he said.

"After chatting to other international trainees it was also great to realise that our training in New Zealand and Australia is world class. I was surprised to learn that many surgical trainees at the same level of training as I myself, are often able to do much less."

Dr Martin completed a degree in Pharmacy at Monash University with post-graduate research in medicinal chemistry before completing his medical degree and going on to work in several hospitals in the south-east suburbs of Melbourne.

He moved to New Zealand in late 2014 to take up a training position in Otolaryngology, starting in Whangarei, Northland and has subsequently spent time training in Auckland, Palmerston North and now Wellington.

He has conducted several research projects and in 2016 presented his work on the *Clinical Characteristics of Long Standing Aspirated Paediatric Foreign Bodies* at the New Zealand Society of Otolaryngology, Head-and-Neck Surgery Annual Meeting.

He has served as a trainee representative on RACS' Indigenous Health Committee, is a member of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) and has volunteered his time to be a part of the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience.

"RACS has shown a real commitment to improving Indigenous health and encouraging more Indigenous people, both Māori and Aboriginal medical students, to pursue a career in surgery," he said.

"The Indigenous Committee continues to work hard to tackle such issues as the disease burden caused by chronic ear disease, Indigenous cancer rates and access to specialist care but it also supports individual Fellows who are doing wonderful work within the Indigenous community both in New Zealand and Australia.

"In New Zealand, ear disease within the Māori community was tackled earlier than it was in Australia, beginning in the 1970s with the introduction of the Earbus program and now we have specialist ear nurses who work with communities in both New Zealand and Australia.

"So, while we have made headway in both countries, there is still a long way to go but we should be encouraged by the dedication of Fellows who give up their time to work with these communities.

"Learning of their work is one of the best aspects of serving on the committee because it provides me with on-going inspiration about how I might be able to contribute once I've completed my ENT training."



Dr Martin said he hoped to spend a month each year treating patients with ENT problems within the Pacific after he has finished his specialist training.

Participating in the week-long course in Bordeaux last year was Dr Martin's first trip to Europe.

As a self-described obsessive bird watcher, he took the opportunity to take another week of holidays afterwards to drive across Northern Spain in search of birds that he would never see in the southern hemisphere.

And he was in luck. During the journey he spotted a Spanish Imperial Eagle and a Lammergeier, an old-world vulture that lives on carrion and bones and which is particularly known for its habit of smashing large bones to access the marrow inside by carrying them high into the air before dropping them on rocks below.

"It was an incredible experience being up in the Pyrenees watching these amazing birds that I have longed to see for a number of years," Dr Martin said.

He thanked RACS and Johnson & Johnson Medical for the funding support.

Dr Martin completed a number of ENT courses. This include:

- The G. Portmann Institute Temporal Bones Dissection Course 2017
- The Auckland Septorhinoplasty Course 2017
- Adelaide Head and Neck Course (Royal Adelaide Hospital) 2016
- The Auckland Temporal Bones Course 2016
- Cochlear Implant Course (Advanced Bionics, Greenlane Hospital) 2016

With Karen Murphy
Surgical News Journalist

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