Tony Palasovski attended meetings to build his skills and improve the learning experience for Trainees

NSW Oncoplastic Breast Surgeon Mr Tony Palasovski has used the funds attached to the Ian and Ruth Gough Surgical Education Scholarship to attend meetings and participate in courses designed to enhance his skills as a surgical educator.

During 2013 Mr Palasovski attended the surgical education section of the College Annual Scientific Congress in Auckland, travelled to France to attend the 19th Annual Meeting of the Society in Europe of Simulation Applied to Medicine (SESAM) and participated in a Surgical Teachers Course in held in Perth in October.

Now a VMO at the Wollongong and Shellharbour Public Hospitals, Mr Palasovski also attended a master-class in thyroid and neck ultrasound held in Melbourne under the direction of Endocrine Surgeon Mr Julie Miller in November.

Mr Palasovski, who is in the process of completing a Masters of Surgery focused on ultrasound in surgery, said he had chosen the meetings and courses to assess the current standards in, and the development of, the use of simulation and ultrasound in Australia.

He said his travels had convinced him of the need to train Australasian surgeons in the use of ultrasound at the point of care – either at consultation, the bedside or in theatre – along with the need to further develop simulation technologies for training purposes.

He said that in an era where safe working hour regulations had significantly reduced the volume of cases and exposure to procedures available to Trainees, simulated training packages could be vital in providing Trainees with the necessary hands-on experience.

“This scholarship gave me the chance to develop a valuable insight into the vast possibilities that exist to enhance surgical education and training,” Mr Palasovski said.

“These begin with the fundamental educational techniques and mentorship as presented at the Perth and Auckland meetings and extend to the most advanced simulation models as demonstrated in Paris.

“The incorporation of ultrasound into mainstream surgical training could be facilitated through simulation to complement the currently available skills courses and this was highlighted in Paris and during the ultrasound master-class in Melbourne.”

Mr Palasovski said that while some first-generation simulation technologies were available in Australia, such as those used to teach laparoscopic procedures, the US and Europe were now using far more sophisticated equipment to train future surgeons.

He said such computerised systems provided biofeedback, analysed movement, downtime and patient welfare all in real time.

“The equipment, technologies and systems presented at the conference in Paris were simply quite amazing and covered most surgical specialties such as paediatrics, endoscopy, emergency medicine and GI surgery,” he said.

“They allow Trainees to practice their skills in an environment that replicates reality in astonishing detail, as if they are handling real tissue in real time.

“There were prosthetic breasts with various pathologies in place in different locations to teach Trainees how to examine and what to look for; there were simulated babies in the paediatric section that reacted to care or distress; there were endoscopic simulation systems and equipment that measured every single thing a surgeon did down to the millisecond.

“I also attended a presentation by surgeons from the University of South Carolina that has an entire, fully staffed simulated operating theatre.

“There, Trainees go through the entire operating process from scrubbing in, to operating, to dealing with intraoperative complications, to closing, to outlining post operative care yet not one thing is real about it.

“Obviously, it would be difficult to fund such an amazing training facility here in Australia, but we could take components from it because I think there is an urgent need to move past our first generation technologies if we are to give our Trainees the skills they need in this era.”

Mr Palasovski also said there was a growing push toward, and need for, ultrasound training of all Australian surgical Trainees, which he described as a major deficit in current training programs.

“Now that we have hand-held ultrasound machines there is no reason that we shouldn’t use them at times when we need more information to make a diagnosis and which could eliminate the need to wait for hours or days for a report,” he said.

“The central problem seems to be that it requires dedicated training and therefore the people to teach it, most of whom are already extremely busy.

“Still, I think within the next 10 years it will become a core part of surgical training, but in the meantime we need to establish a task force through the College to investigate the best way to introduce and implement ultrasound training across Australia.”
Mr Palasovski said he had developed a keen interest in surgical education and academic surgery since he designed a training course for registrars and medical students at the Wollongong Hospital in 2011.

He said the Travel Scholarship had also allowed him to focus on not only the technical aspects of surgical education, but the optimum methods of transferring knowledge to enhance not only the skills and knowledge of Trainees, but also the Trainee experience. “I now firmly believe that it is no longer satisfactory simply to teach operative skills to Trainees,” he said.

“The education of surgeons begins with simple communication techniques, involves ongoing mentorship and debriefing and incorporates current technologies in simulation, including point of care ultrasound.

“There is a distinction between being a supervisor and mentor, for instance, that needs to be understood and there are communication methods that can be adopted to help Trainees learn and retain what they have learned.

“In particular, I believe we need to introduce new methods of supervision and debriefing of Trainees, where we can go over any mistakes that may have been made in a way that transfers the necessary knowledge without crushing their confidence.

“No-one can go through surgical training without making a mistake, but it should be less traumatic for Trainees so developing our use of simulation technology could provide Trainees with the experience they need to gain both the necessary skills and confidence.

The Ian and Ruth Gough Surgical Education Scholarship was established to encourage surgeons to become expert surgical educators.

Mr Palasovski said he had been honoured to have been selected to receive it and that he had already changed his training methods within the Wollongong hospital.

“It was a great privilege to be able to travel to all these places and learn about so many aspects of modern surgical education and training and the enormous possibilities available to us,” he said.

“All the meetings and courses have provided me with fascinating concepts and I have already changed my practice in the way I approach Trainees, explain procedures and debrief them and I hope to develop my approach to, and understanding of, surgical education for years to come.”

With Karen Murphy

Tony Palasovski’s Current Projects and Professional Activity

- Master of Surgery, University of Sydney.
- Establishment of modular teaching program for surgical registrars at Wollongong Hospital incorporating current curriculum in General Surgery.
- Establishment of modular surgical skills program for surgical registrars at Wollongong Hospital incorporating open and laparoscopic principles.
- Development of modular teaching program for registrars in General Surgery focusing on the instruction, practice and use of ultrasound in surgery – currently intended for registrars at Wollongong Hospital, but will be extended to Trainees on a national basis.
- Examiner for clinical component of primary exams June 2012 (Newcastle).
- Founding member and past Vice President of Australian Macedonian Medical Society (AMMMDOC).
- Member of the Academy of Surgical Educators.
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Announcement of Medico Legal Meeting

The AOA/RACS/MedLaw Combined Medico Legal Meeting will be held at the Sydney Masonic Centre, 66 Goulburn St Sydney, on Friday 21 and Saturday 22 November 2014.

For details please contact Kevin Wickham, Conference Secretariat, at kevinwickham@iinet.net.au.

The Congress Centre de la Villette, Paris.