

Meticulous, cautious, dedicated, kid-friendly “teacher” pediatric neurosurgeons at a joyful hospital with a bunch of success stories in store; is the apt portrayal of the neurosurgical team at Nicklaus Children's hospital- my destination for a month long observership thanks to AASAN. They stand true to their motto “Together for the children”.

As part of my AASAN Ambassadorship award for 2017-18; I visited Dr Sanjiv Bhatia and shadowed his team in the month of May 2018.

The prestige of being the first woman to be honored with this title came with its own unique set of responsibilities. So I packed a total of 15-ish luggage items, put my daughter Shreeaa in my trusted Ergo carrier, took my in-laws along to help me take care of my baby, emptied my bank accounts while doing so and reached the sunshine state; all ready to simulate a neo house in Miami for a month.

The department of Neurosurgery stands tall in a building brightly daunted with amazing depictions of flowers and trees, birds and animals, princesses and cars. The hospital reminisces one of the sea aquarium nearby as the CT machine simulates an underwater experience. The MRI suite also has choices available-choose your pick: submarine or the space!!! A big teddy bear sits in the director's office in the Neurosurgery department. Dr Bhatia's office greets one merrily with its many cute “thank you “cards from his lovely patients.

All that on the outside. These are very serious children-people. Every single day, all consultants round at 6.15 am. There is academic discussion at 7am. The OR commences at 7.30 am and continues as long as it takes to ensure minimal morbidity and maximum positive recovery for every child.

What followed was a thrilling, appealing, sumptuous and fantabulous neurosurgical feast. I witnessed and relished a variegated collection of pediatric neurosurgical cases. As against the norm that we in India operate on large tumors; and people in the West mainly deal with small tumors; I saw a decent iota of complicated surgeries here. Indeed a post-chemoradiation fibrous residue of a large germ cell tumor or excision of exophytic component of a massive midbrain low grade glioma post radiation was far from being simple and easy. From thalamic tumors to ETV with CPC, occipital encephalocele repair to posterior fossa surgeries- I savored it all. There was apt use of advance technology in the form of neuronavigation (Brain lab), stereotaxy, intra-operative MRI, intra-operative neuromonitoring, intra-operative ultrasonography and intra-operative ECoG to name a few.

Epilepsy surgery was a different domain altogether. Phase 2 invasive monitoring, stereotactic deep electrode placement, subdural grid placement were performed in a very dedicated manner. Teaching was a definite part of every activity. It was indeed not infrequent that the professors sat calmly in the assistant's position and taught their students the tricks and trade of operative neurosurgery.

Even though I was just “observing”; based on my neurosurgical training and Dr Bhatia's elaborate intra-operative orations; it was easy to pick the subtle cues and grasp the tricks. I am definitely looking forward to apply many of these in my practice over the next few years.

I participated in radiology meets, Neuro-oncology board conferences, epilepsy clinics, epilepsy meets, multidisciplinary ICU care and multi pronged aggressive management. These amply illustrated the significance of structured organization and integrated comprehensive management to optimize child care to the fullest.

All this time gave me a wonderful opportunity to bombard Dr Bhatia with questions and doubts and he was generous enough to bear all along.

Dr John Ragheb and Dr Toba Niazi were very kind to answer and explain their operative ideologies.

I have started work on 2 academic papers so far and hope to write more with these lively neurosurgeons at the Miami Children's.

As I am destined to start as Assistant Professor back home, I also engaged in conversation with Dr Bhatia about fellowship in the states, current condition and needs of neurosurgery in India; avenues for mentoring and teaching in India and developing dedicated programs for pediatric neurosurgery here.

I have a very good head start in pediatric neurosurgery now. In the near future, I intend to dedicate at least a year to train in pediatric neurosurgery and then hopefully start a pediatric brain tumor program in India.

I thank AASAN for this wonderful opportunity. I have a dream and I want to fly; I thank AASAN for adding wings to it.

Per verbatim from one of my mentors; "It is good to be dharma-yogi; but better to be karma-yogi. These saintly humane teachers dedicated to the most innocent community of patients are real karma-yogis. Spending time with them has definitely opened my eyes to a realm of progress, development and success garnished with humility, passion and dedication.

Thank you Dr Bhatia! Thank you AASAN!

-Dr Sonal Ashok Jain

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