
Report of the 2009 International Guest Scholar

by *Jaqueline Cruz Vargas, MD*

As International Guest Scholar, my pre-Congress tour started in June 2009 at the Mayo Clinic Symposium in Reconstructive Microsurgery. At that point, I visited Samir Mardini, MD, at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, and in October 2009, I met Allen Van Beek, MD, FACS, in Minneapolis, MN. My post-Congress tour included a visit to Luis Vásconez, MD, FACS, in Birmingham, AL, and participation in the Plastic Surgery Congress in Seattle, WA.

Mayo Clinic Symposium

I attended the first Mayo Clinic Symposium in Reconstructive Microsurgery in Rochester, MN. The guest of honor and principal speaker was Fu-Chan Wei, MD, an international expert from Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taiwan (see photo, this page). The intensive four-day program covered the latest innovations and techniques in free tissue transfers and local flap options for treatment of body-wide reconstruction. Forty of the most knowledgeable and experienced faculty worldwide also attended.

On the first day of the symposium, I observed anatomical dissection of pedicle and microsurgical flaps, performed by renowned experts. I then performed the same dissection under their supervision. Dur-



Dr. Cruz (right) with Dr. Wei (center) in the laboratory training section of the Mayo Clinical Symposium in Reconstructive Microsurgery.

ing the following three days, I listened to presentations of research in the field, and reports on experiences gathered over several years of thoughtful study.

In Peru, regular courses on microsurgery did not exist until very recently. I have organized small courses on the subject for residents and young plastic surgeons since 2007. The symposium at the Mayo Clinic helped me further improve these courses. At the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Lima, Peru, where I work, we do not have an exclu-

sive laboratory for training in microsurgery. During a recent basic course of microsurgery that I organized in January, I implemented a provisional laboratory. We used low-cost resources, including stereoscopes for visual magnification (commonly used by the faculty of biology), and training on microvascular anastomosis, using vessels of less than 1 mm in diameter, on chicken pieces purchased from the market. With these resources, a large number of surgeons can be trained to develop microsurgical skills in their specialties. A workshop

of pedicle and microsurgical free flap techniques took place in March. This course was based on the format employed in the symposium at the Mayo Clinic. An advanced course of microsurgery is scheduled for July in Lima. There, again, I will be able to put in to practice my latest knowledge on microsurgery.

Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN

I spent one week in June 2009 with Dr. Mardini, one of the organizers of the symposium, at the Mayo Clinic. I met Dr. Mardini during a visit he made to Peru a year ago. He wrote a book about voice reconstruction produced with Hung-chi Cheng, MD, in Taiwan, and another about microsurgery reconstruction with Dr. Wei. Mayo Clinic is recognized and respected for its excellence in health care internationally, so it was a privilege to be there and to benefit from the excellent opportunity to attend the surgeries and conferences.

I attended many operations performed by various surgeons at St. Mary's Hospital, Rochester, MN. I was especially impressed by the operation involving facial reanimation in a child with a congenital facial palsy, reconstructed with a gracilis free flap. I learned a lot about this type of surgery. I was also present in a craneosinostosis surgery, and breast, chest, and extremities reconstructions, some requiring free and pedicle flaps to cover the wounds.

*Van Beek AL, Hatfield AS, Schnepf E. Cleft rhinoplasty, plastic and reconstructive surgery. *Plast. Reconstr. Surg J.* 2004;114(4):57e-69e.

I was impressed not only by the professionalism with which the surgeons operated, but by their extraordinary teamwork.

Dr. Mardini offered to collaborate with me and surgeons from my country in developing microsurgery, particularly in facial palsy. These types of surgery are just beginning in Peru, so expertise is very much required. Dr. Mardini goes periodically on missions to Peru to perform free surgeries for disadvantaged children who otherwise would never receive operations of this kind.

My experience at the Mayo Clinic was academically enriching. The innovations observed in patient care, medical research, and the academic formation of human resources will improve my teaching and research skills.

Centennial Medical Lakes Center, Minneapolis, MN

During a single week, in June 2009, I visited Dr. Van Beek at Centennial Medical Lakes Center (see photo, this page). I had chosen to visit him due to the fact that he is a recognized plastic surgeon who has published many articles about plastic surgery, particularly an article on cleft lip nose, which was published in the *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Journal*.^{*} He helps poor children from South America, doing cleft lip, cleft nose, and reconstructive surgery in various missions. A past-president of the American Society of Hand Surgery, Dr. Van Beek is also well-regarded for hand reconstructive surgery.

In the consulting rooms, I ob-



Dr. Cruz with Dr. Van Beek.

served patients with hand damage. Dr. Van Beek explained the situations of the patients, case-by-case. I observed a fine dissection that he used performing a micro-dissection of the hand nerves in one patient with nerve injuries. He dissected all the branches carefully, and then repaired the nerve under the microscope. At the end of the process, I was able to witness the wonderful results during the follow-up consultation.

In Peru, the incident of labial fissure is high. For every 700 children who are born, there is one case of labial and/or cleft palate. The facial sequels that a child has after the repair of the lip include an asymmetry marked with the nose, the nasal collapsed wing, a nasal fallen tip, and the nasal septum deviant. Therefore, one of my



Dr. Cruz with her mentor, Juan Noguera, MD, FACS (left), and with Kate Early, Administrator of the ACS International Liaison Section, at the Clinical Congress in Chicago, IL.



Dr. Cruz with Dr. Vásconez at Kirkland Clinic.

goals was to learn from Dr. Van Beek the way he corrects cleft nose. It was amazing to witness this kind of surgery and the immediate results. After the surgeries, we had a chance to discuss cleft patients. I showed him the cases I performed, and he offered me precious advice on how to get improved results. I am now putting in to practice his advice when attending to cleft patients at my hospital.

2009 Clinical Congress

I attended the very well-organized and unforgettable ACS Clinical Congress, including the Convocation Ceremony for new Fellows. Personally, it was a great honor to rise to the platform in McCormick Place Convention Center when they named the International Guest Scholars for 2009, in front of researchers, teachers, and di-

rectors of the College. I must acknowledge the excellent work of the International Relations Committee for providing all the necessary support to the scholars (see photos, this page).

On October 10, 2009, I attended the College's International Travelers, 2009 Session, where the International Guest Scholars presented their surgical interests and described the practice of surgery in their homelands. I presented my work, entitled Development of Microsurgery in a Developing Country. I explained how I was able to deliver a microsurgery course training in my country without a sophisticated laboratory and few resources, such as used stereoscopes obtained from the biology faculty, and practicing with chicken pieces. My work has greatly benefited

from my pre-Congress tour, the last visit to Mayo Clinic, the comments of Dr. Van Beek, and the symposium on microsurgery. I enjoyed all the sessions because they gave me an opportunity to share my best experiences, and to hear the experiences of my colleagues in their countries.

University of Alabama-Birmingham, AL

During the two weeks after the 2009 Clinical Congress, I visited Dr. Vásconez at the University of Alabama-Birmingham (see photo, this page). I chose to visit him because he is a well-published, eminent plastic surgeon, and highly respected due to his work in breast reconstruction. Dr. Vásconez receives difficult cases referred by other surgeons from various parts of the world. We worked



Lima, Peru: The basic microsurgery course using few resources for implementing a microsurgery training laboratory.

the surgical team, for future collaboration.

Plastic Surgery Congress, Seattle, WA

Many important plastic surgeons presented their work at this meeting. Typically, each presentation was followed by expert faculty debates, during which different approaches to surgical problems were discussed. These debates provided a forum for discussing, for example, the strengths and limitations of cosmetic and reconstructive techniques. This meeting offered an opportunity for participants to learn about the latest plastic surgery research.

Out of this experience, I learned surgical techniques for achieving best results. As a result of what I learned at this meeting, I have made some modifications to the content in the courses that I teach, and I have translated these concepts into practice in my daily performance at the public hospital.

Conclusion

It was a wonderful opportunity for me, as a young surgeon from Peru, to learn from the most prestigious surgeons of the world, attend their surgeries, and, most of all, exchange ideas and knowledge personally. Thanks to that, I gained confidence in my medical practice. At the same time, it gave me a perspective on how to contribute to the development of microsurgery here in my country.

With the knowledge I acquired, I was able to optimize

out a detailed schedule for the week's activities with his team that included surgeries and academic activities.

I was present in the OR at UAB Highlands Hospital in Birmingham, AL, where I had the opportunity to observe many difficult cases of breast reconstruction, with and without implants. I also saw difficult cases of advanced skin cancer on the face, and reconstruction with flaps. I learned how to determine and solve an infection in a patient who had breast reconstruction with a saline implant—conserving the implant, cleaning the implant, and revitalizing the tissues following careful management.

I saw other reconstruction surgeries on different parts of the body, performed by Dr. Vásconez's team. I also accompanied the follow-up pro-

cedures of the surgeries in the consulting room at the Kirklin Clinic, Birmingham, AL, and I enjoyed watching the excellent results of the surgeries, and the management of complex cases referred to Dr. Vásconez.

Once a week, we had an academic session. I had the opportunity to discuss cleft nose repair, and I exchanged ideas about the cleft nose treatment with other surgeons on Dr. Vásconez's team, and participated in discussions about complex cases and the best ways to manage them. The well-organized program, the numerous appointments, and the sense of partnership and collaboration showed to me by Dr. Vásconez's team made me feel comfortable all the time. I also had the opportunity to establish good relationships with

the basic microsurgery course that I run at the university, using locally available resources (see photo, page 48). In March 2010 I presented the first course on flaps in microsurgery. This was an opportunity to put into practice all the knowledge gained through this scholarship at the American College of Surgeons, and to share my experiences with other colleagues at the

university, with students of our faculty, and with colleagues from my public hospital.

I would like to thank the American College of Surgeons and its International Relations Committee for the great opportunity to learn about the latest research and development in surgery, and, at the same time, obtain international exposure. This experience has stimulated

my interest in new areas of specialization, and has encouraged me to continue teaching at a medical facility, and to pursue in-depth medical research—which is much needed in my home country.

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