

2019 ACS/AAST INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

REPORT FROM THE 2019 ACS/AAST INTERNATIONAL SCHOLAR, ONYEDIKA GODFREY OKOYE (MBBS, FACS, FWACS, FMCS, FICS, MBA)

INTRODUCTION

It was a Friday night in May 2019; I was on call and just finished a trauma laparotomy for a stab wound to abdomen, when I got an email from Kate Early informing me about my selection as the 2019 ACS/AAST International scholar. I was so excited and quickly accepted the offer by replying within few seconds. That was the beginning of long and interesting correspondences, preparations and arrangements that culminated in an experience that I will simply describe as a “once in a life time” event.

PRE-TRAVEL PREPARATIONS

The Scholarship among other things enabled me to attend the 78th annual meeting of the AAST and clinical congress of acute care surgery at Sheraton Dallas, September 18 – 21, 2019. The pre-travel preparations were smooth with timely information, free registration to all sessions and free accommodation for seven nights at Sheraton Hotels Dallas, with complimentary high-speed internet service and access to fitness centre. The scholarship stipend in the amount of \$5000 was wired into my account, a few days prior to my departure. Proposed visits to some selected trauma centres were arranged. Special meetings were also arranged ahead of time with exact venue and time including the agenda. A mentor was assigned to me to help simplify my logistics. These early preparations were possible due to the efforts of the AAST executive director, Sharon Gautschy and her dynamic team.

MY MENTOR

I was virtually floating like someone in the wilderness, in such a large gathering till I met this wonderful gentleman Dr Weidun Alan Guo who was assigned by AAST to be my mentor. Dr Guo made my entire experience a smooth and seamless one. Dr Guo confirmed my meetings and gave me reminder to all my activities while in Dallas. He followed me up even after the meeting to ensure that I made all my scheduled visits to the selected trauma centres. I am personally indebted to him.

ACTIVITIES AT THE EVENT

A. SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS/ SESSIONS

I got my name badge within a minute at the registration desk upon arrival. I attended most of the scientific sessions, meetings, poster presentations, master lectures and quick shots. They were quite educating and revealing. The international attendee breakfast meeting was quite exciting, and the master lectures were informative. Current trends and new research findings in trauma and acute care surgery, covering a wide range of topics were presented and discussed. The knowledge gained in such a short time was overwhelming and too extensive to outline here.

B. MEETING WITH THE ACS COMMITTEE ON TRAUMA LEADERSHIP

The meeting with the leadership of the Committee on Trauma of American College of Surgeons was quite inspiring. We had a very engaging and fruitful discussion about trauma system and processes, TQIP, trauma registries and trauma education. I shared my current circumstances, my plans and my challenges with the committee. I got very encouraging feedback with numerous suggestions. I was also assured of the committee's support in implementing my plans. Dr Ronald Stewart ended the day by training me as an instructor on Stop the Bleed course and charged me with the responsibility of kick starting the training back home as an instructor.

C. MEETING WITH INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

I was privileged to be invited to the international relations committee (IRC) meeting. I was warmly welcomed by the International Committee's chair, Dr Michel Aboutanos and his team. I shared my current work experience, my challenges and the expectations from the meeting. I had attended the International Attendee breakfast meeting the previous day where I met many of the Attendees from different parts of the world.

D. BUSINESS MEETING/BANQUET

The business meeting was "real business". There were many items on the agenda, but surprisingly, very fast presentations and deliberations. I was recognised and given my certificate during this meeting. It was a very exciting moment for me as I was called to the stage to receive my certificate from the AAST president Dr Martin Croce and the IRC Chair, Dr Aboutanos. The business meeting ended in a short while and was closely followed by an action-packed banquet.

E. THE EXHIBITION STAND

There was quite interesting array of drug and device companies at the exhibition stand. I spent some valuable time in the exhibition stand between sessions. I learnt a lot from the interactions. I was able to establish some contacts for future purchases. In a bid to reduce the cost of my 2020 meeting at Hawaii, I participated in the 'passport to prizes' raffle draw for two days with no luck! However, I enjoyed every moment spent in the stand.

VISIT TO SELECTED TRAUMA CENTRES

The week following the annual meeting was busy for me as I visited three pre-selected Level 1 Trauma Centres. The purpose of the visits among other things was to see and have some discussion around the set up and organisation of the centres with the view of learning from the system.

Parkland Trauma Center at UT Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, Texas was the first. Dr Joseph Minei picked me up from my hotel room at 6:45am on Monday 23rd September 2019. I attended their morning review and was shown around the facilities. I had a wonderful time in the ER with the trauma nurse managers who gave me a lot of details about their system and processes. The visit ended with a lunch at the medical school where I had the privilege of meeting the acting Chair, Dr Fiemu Nwariaku.

Ben Taub Trauma Center/ Baylor College of Medicine in Texas Medical Center, Houston, Texas was next. I was warmly received by Dr Chad Wilson at 6:45am on Wednesday 25th September 2019. We attended the departmental grand round at the Michael DeBakey Department of Surgery. I was subsequently shown around the facilities including the brand-new modern theatre suites. I had the rare privilege of having a great discussion with the trauma legend, Dr Kenneth Mattox who took me for lunch at a nearby Mediterranean restaurant. I ended the day at the Michael E. DeBakey museum which was an amazing place to visit.

Finally, I visited **Dell Seton Medical Center in Austin, Texas** on Friday 27th September 2019. I was warmly received by Dr Carlos Brown who took his time to show me through their new and fascinating facilities with interesting fruitful discussions about their systems and processes. We had lunch together and I ended up at the Texas capitol, a great place to visit.

LESSONS LEARNT

The Lessons learnt from the entire scholarship package were overwhelming. First and foremost, it was a humbling experience for me. I saw another world with a different order of things. My expectations were exceeded. I have decided to enumerate a few of the major lessons learnt to save space. They include, but are not limited to the following:

1. A large body of new clinical knowledge on trauma care based on current research findings, too exhaustive to outline here.
2. Complementary valuable information at the exhibition stand
3. Tips on how to manage a Trauma Centre - in terms of organization, structure, resources, processes and efficiency
4. Essentials of Trauma Quality Improvement Programs
5. Better ways of keeping a Trauma Registry
6. How to set up a Trauma System in a region
7. Networking as part of the human existence

EXPECTED IMPACT/ THE FUTURE

The overall impact of the entire scholarship on my life as a trauma surgeon and by extension to my home country, Nigeria would be tremendous. This visit will definitely change my practice as a surgeon and the way we manage trauma in the region. I will highlight some of the expected impact and my future plans:

1. Development of a functional trauma system:
I will collaborate with the Ministry of Health and the Federal Capital Territory Emergency Management Services (FCT EMS) to reinforce the efforts towards setting up a functional trauma system in the region. This will involve a lot of advocacy and the cooperation of my influential senior colleagues particularly those in authority and those who are interested in trauma care.
2. Development of suitable and practical trauma guidelines and protocols: I, together with my team and senior colleagues, will develop trauma guidelines in line with our resources and capabilities. This will help ensure a reasonable standard of care.

3. Setting up local TQIP activities to improve the overall trauma services and outcomes: With the support of the ACS COT, I will like to develop TQIP metrics suitable for a resource poor region like West Africa. This will include modification of the existing registry in my centre and involving other centres in a bid to create a uniform registry for the region.
4. Trauma education and capacity building: I will collaborate with American College of Surgeons, Nigeria Chapter to make ATLS training in Nigeria more active and more accessible to the doctors in the country. This will involve efforts towards opening up new centres in different parts of the country with the support of ACS COT. I will also work with them to initiate and attract new courses that are relevant to our setting such as the ATOM and ASSET courses.
5. Research interest: My interest in research is reactivated more than ever before. I will work with my colleagues to improve our engagement in research. I have plans to extend my research interests beyond my country through the collaborations and network I established in the AAST meeting.
6. Networking and Collaborations: I will continue to network and collaborate with the colleagues I met in the United States. I intend to join the AAST as active member to enable me expand this network. I strongly believe that this will help my career in all respects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Maintain the scholarship: This scholarship is very beneficial and should be maintained as much as is possible.
2. Formal presentation to the International Relations Committee (IRC): I suggest that the scholar be made to present his/her current work and challenges to the IRC. This will enable him get suggestions on how to tackle some of his/her challenges.
3. Optional Presentation at the meeting: I think giving the Scholar an option of a quick shot or poster presentation may encourage him/her to be more involved during the event. This in my opinion should be optional, for those who are able to get their work ready for this type of presentation. In this regard, early notification of the scholarship might help.
4. Membership of AAST: Scholars should be encouraged to become active members of AAST.

5. Creation of a feedback mechanism: It will be nice to follow up the progress of the old scholars to know what impact they have been able to make and also know their challenges. This can be in form of a report written to the IRC at determined intervals probably every two to three years or invitation to their meeting during the AAST annual event.

CONCLUSION

This ACS/AAST scholarship award visit was a turning point in my professional life as a trauma surgeon. It will definitely change our practice in trauma care and acute care surgery. It has added so much in my quest to champion the transformation and improvement of trauma care in the West African sub region. I will continue to count on the support of the different relevant sections of ACS/AAST to enable me to succeed in this task. I give all the glory to the almighty God, our help in ages past and our hope for the years to come.

APPRECIATION

I am very grateful to the following persons and institutions:

1. The Leadership of ACS/AAST
2. The ACS Committee on Trauma
3. The Leadership of AAST International Relations Committee
4. My mentor Dr Weidun Alan Guo
5. Parkland Trauma Center, Dallas
6. Ben Taub Medical Centre/ Baylor College of Medicine, Houston
7. Dell Seton Medical Centre, Austin
8. Dr Peter Ekeh
9. ACS, Nigeria Chapter
10. Management of National Hospital Abuja, Nigeria
11. My lovely wife Uche and our Children Ifunanya, Chidubem and Zoe

FINANCIAL REPORT

N	ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST (USD)
1	Return International Flight ticket to Dallas	Lufthansa economy class	1850
2	Return Local flight ticket to Houston	United airline economy class	420
3	Airport taxi	Airport taxi service at arrival and Uber taxi service at departure	96
4	Accommodation	Additional 5 nights' accommodation at Dallas and Houston	842
5	Bus transportation	From Houston to Austin using Greyhound bus services	55
6	Taxi shuttles	Uber taxi services within the cities up to 6 trips	300
7	Feeding	Feeding	375
8	Communication	Metro by T- mobile phone/ sim card and data for communication outside the hotel premises	80
	TOTAL		4,018



Receiving my certificate at the AAST annual business meeting on September 20, 2019. L-R: Dr Martin Croce (AAST President), Dr Onyedika Godfrey Okoye (award recipient), Dr Weidun Guo (My mentor) and Dr Michel Aboutanos (IRC Chair)



With my mentor Dr Weidun Alan Guo, at the International Attendee breakfast meeting, Dallas on September 19, 2019



With Dr Joseph Minei at Parkland Trauma Center, Dallas, September 23, 2019



At Ben Taub Medical Centre/ Baylor College of Medicine, Houston on September 25, 2019. L – R: Dr Kenneth Mattox, Dr Onyedika Godfrey Okoye and Dr Chad Wilson



With Dr Carlos Brown at the Dell Seton Medical Centre, Austin on September 27, 2019



With another mentor and a member of IRC, Dr Peter Ekeh in Dallas



At the AAST Banquet, Dallas September 20, 2019



Lunch with Mattox and Mary in Houston September 25, 2019



With the Medical Director, COT, ACS, Dr Ronald Stewart at Dallas

