

GORDON SIGNY FELLOWSHIP REPORT – Dr Poonam K Panjwani

Institution : Stanford University, California, USA
Department : Hematopathology

Period : April to June 2016

Mentor : Dr Yasodha Natkunam

It is with great pleasure that I submit my report to the World Pathology Foundation having completed my training at the Stanford University. I chose to undergo training at the hematopathology department under the able guidance of Dr Yasodha Natkunam for a period of 3 months from April to June 2016.

The department was always abuzz with the hectic reporting of hematology samples and it was a privilege to get exposed to the sophisticated laboratories and advanced diagnostic techniques. Stanford is one of the best known centres for oncology case management, and the department received a huge load of referral cases from different parts of USA and rest of the world. Being able to attend the reporting of these challenging cases gave me a huge opportunity to expand my insight on the perplexities of hematolymphoid malignancies. Some of these cases were extremely rare and required good clinico-pathological correlation. The department had regular consensus conferences wherein all the difficult cases would be discussed by the expert faculty and every effort to arrive at the correct diagnosis would be made.

Molecular diagnosis was also a stronghold in the department and I was able to devote some time in the molecular laboratory and get familiar with techniques like cytogenetics, FISH, Flow cytometry, RT-PCR and also get an insight into highly specialized tests like next generation sequencing. Many of these tests are currently available only at selected centres in India and I hope I can contribute to the development of atleast some of these at my work place.

I was also able to attend on a daily basis the educational activities held as a part of the post graduate teaching. I found the topics extremely helpful not only to the postgraduates, but also to the faculty as many new emerging concepts would be covered and the topics were highly informative. The department conducted their annual Research Retreat programme which highlighted the various research activities conducted by the pathology department at Stanford. I thought this was an excellent platform for young post graduates and research staff to showcase their work and the diversity of the research papers was astounding.

Under Dr Natkunam's supervision, I was also able to work on a project on markers of immune therapy in lymphomas. Immune therapy is coming up in a big way in major way for various autoimmune and malignant conditions and I was able to work on a large number of lymphoid malignancies as a part of my project. It was exciting to work on these cases and understand the varied tumour biology. Dr Natkunam is a world renowned hematopathologist with numerous publications to her credit. She turned out to be an excellent guide, who always encouraged me to present my ideas for the research project. She is an excellent teacher, and I was able to learn a lot

about lymphoma diagnosis with her inputs. She inspires me to not only be a good pathologist, but yearn to be a good teacher and mentor. I am currently working with her to publish the results of our study.

It was a privilege to attend reporting sessions with highly reputed hematopathologists and this experience is invaluable. Their enthusiastic yet humble approach to teaching and diagnostics was very inspiring. I think I may not have enough words to describe the regard I have for all the faculty who took their time out to teach various aspects of the subject and solve so many doubts that I had.

I would also like to mention that apart from the educational training, the 3 month period also gave me an opportunity to interact with residents and faculty from various parts of the world. Their warm interaction and exchange of knowledge made the training period all the more enjoyable. I also interacted with some highly trained technical staff, whose knowledge in their field amazed me and the guidance I got from them is highly productive in my work. The staff at Stanford was also very helpful and never let me feel lost for anything. I owe them all a big heartfelt thanks!

Apart from my training, I also got to experience in a small way the natural treasures that the USA is enriched with. I was able to visit a few national parks. Being an avid nature lover, these trips were relaxing and refreshing especially over the weekend after a very busy week!

I would like to thank the World Pathology Foundation for having provided me this opportunity with the Gordon Signy Fellowship Award for 2016 to have successfully completed my training period. It has not only helped me in my academic quest, but also has helped me at a personal level. I am looking forward to use all my acquired skills at my work place in India.

The award was a great help and I would like to say that it is very commendable that the World Pathology Foundation reaches out to so many young pathologists from developing countries like me every year. I am sure that many more pathologists will benefit in the future and I would once again want to thank the organization for that. I am sure a few small steps ultimately lead to giant leaps and the organization can take great pride in its efforts toward this goal.

Thank you for all your support.

Dr Poonam K Panjwani,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Pathology,
St John's Medical College,
Bangalore, India.