



Essay

Swiss-Korean Exchange Program in Neurosurgical Spine Surgery: Experience of the First Year

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Received: March 1, 2018

Accepted: March 3, 2018

As president of the Swiss Neurosurgical Society, it is a pleasure to report the experiences of the Swiss-Korean Exchange Program after a successful first year. The high standards of medical technology, openness of our Korean counterparts, and a sense of hospitality founded the idea to establish an exchange fellowship with Korea. Switzerland may also offer many opportunities for Korean neurosurgeons as well. Although the population of Switzerland is only 8 million people, we have a fast-moving cultural life with 4 national languages and the respective differences in traditions, habits, and approaches to medicine.

With the modern increase in global political tensions, it is crucial that we, neurosurgeons, try to work together without being pushed back by national borders. The exchange program between Korea and Switzerland shall allow younger neurosurgeons to spend 6 weeks in the other country to be exposed to the local medical system, learn other medical approaches and surgical techniques, and finally to establish a personal network and lifelong friendships. Different perspectives on how to approach and solve clinical pathologies are an eminently important part of neurosurgical education.

Therefore, representatives of the National Societies in Korea and Switzerland sought third party grants to support our junior colleagues. Fortunately, substantial financial support could be raised by the medical technology companies in the cooperating countries; L&K in Korea and Medtronic in Switzerland. The sponsorship by these companies is an important sign and was appreciated very much.

Today, 2 Swiss neurosurgeons had the honour to be hosted in Seoul. Both are at the end of their residencies or short after having passed the board exam and have a special interest in spine surgery. They were warmly welcomed by the team in the Gangnam Severance Spine Hospital. They were exposed to the whole spectrum in spine surgery, including tumour surgery and surgery of spinal deformities. Both were amazed that there were no fundamental differences in the way particular interventions were performed, however picked up several procedural details and nuances that indicate the local influence on 'standard procedures.'

While comparisons between surgeries and surgical techniques in Korea and Switzerland show no major disparities, nursing on the ward reveals differences in philosophy, history, and sources. Six-bedded rooms abound in Switzerland today and the practice of bringing a family member of the patient to help is unfortunately unknown. This may reflect the reality of an oversaturated health system in Switzerland and on the other side an emerging one.



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Both out-bound Swiss neurosurgeons were excited to get in close touch with the one of the most dynamic, evolving and innovative countries in Asia. The Gangnam Severance Spine Hospital offered ideal exposure to Korean Neurosurgical Spine practices. Furthermore, it allowed that both visitors got in touch with other spine units in Seoul itself. As a unique highlight, the second out-bound Swiss Neurosurgeons had the opportunity to participate in the Korean Neurosurgical Spine winter meeting. The hospitality did not end at the gate of the hospital, but both Swiss surgeons reported several events they also were introduced to Korean culture and social life by their local colleagues.

From the Swiss side, we had the honour to welcome In September 2017 the first in-bound Korean Neurosurgeon visitor in Switzerland. To get in touch with the diversity of the Swiss national health system, he spent 3 weeks at the neurosurgical spine unit in the St. Anna Clinic in Lucerne and 3 weeks at the University Hospital in Bern. Although the St. Anna Clinic is a private hospital within the highly representative Hirslanden group, the neurosurgical spine unit offers teaching activities and is often visited by international fellows. In contrast to public hospitals, the organization of the spine unit is consultant based. The rotation in the neurosurgical department at the University Hospital in Bern allowed participation in the academic structures of the national health system. In both hospitals it was a delight to host our in-bound Korean guest. The open mentality of our guest allowed numerous case-discussions which were very valuable for both sides. Our junior residents

especially appreciated learning more about the Korean perspective in treating spinal diseases. Our senior staff cherished the respectful and interested attitude of our guest.

The exchange program depends on the financial support from both countries. Today, it is mandatory that medical technology companies assist such activities, especially as the individual sponsorship is abandoned in Switzerland. The future of sponsorship will work only by support through a society which can then appoint individual recipients. As a thank you to the sponsor, the 2 out-bound Swiss neurosurgeons are obliged to give a talk at a Medtronic dedicated session at our annual national Neurosurgical meeting. This offers them the opportunity to present their experiences in Korea to junior and senior neurosurgeons and inspire others to apply for next year's exchange.

Hereby, I would like to call the industry to support this type of international exchange on a long-term basis. It is crucial that our future generations have the possibility to interact with colleges worldwide. More and more Europeans realize the strong future of Asia, and are fascinated in evolving technologies, especially in Korea.

In summary, I profoundly hope that we can continue our exchange program between Korea and Switzerland and call to establish similar projects between other countries. Obviously, it is not only an exchange in the medical field, it offers a cultural exchange and establishes lifelong global friendships. Finally, it helps us to understand other countries with different mentalities and philosophies and increases the complementary respect which is required for future global development.