Rural Surgery Fellowship for Provincial Surgeons 2015
Royal College of Surgeons Surgical Training for the Austere Environment course

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envisaging humanitarian work as a surgeon.”

Mr Neil Kling, FRACS
General Surgeon
Bunbury, WA

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to travel to the UK to participate in the Royal College of Surgeons Surgical Training for the Austere Environment (STAE) course run by David Nott and the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

In spite of working in a high trauma environment in South Africa, followed by 12 years as a regional surgeon in Bunbury WA, Australia, I felt I lacked preparation (especially obstetrics and gynaecology) to work in more austere locations than Bunbury.

Attending the STAE course was both inspiring and instructive. I was struck by the commitment and experience of the faculty, and participants, many who were already working in the humanitarian field for Médecins Sans Frontières, various UK college outreach programs and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Apart from refreshing the general surgical trauma management, we covered the physics and clinical impact of ballistics and explosions, neurosurgery, maxillofacial, vascular, thoracic, orthopaedic, paediatric, plastics, obstetric and gynaecological surgery. After being divided into small groups (2-4), we were tasked and facilitated to perform a number of very useful procedures for simulated mine explosion and high velocity missile injuries in the austere environment on fresh cadavers, and in simulation labs (similar to the DSTC). We went on further to wire maxillofacial fractures, shunt, bypass, repair various vascular injuries (including fem-pop and carotid), any different plastic procedures – performing random facial, scalp, gastrocnemius, adipofascial perforator flaps, groin flaps, orthopaedic procedures - tendon and nerve repairs, fasciotomies, contaminated open fracture debridement, various amputations. I was fortunate enough to perform a Latissimus dorsi flap and hindquarter amputation with help from the faculty.

The one day we spent at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, was invaluable. The course and faculty were excellent. We covered normal vaginal deliveries, difficult (including full dilated, floating head, twin and breech, etc) caesarean sections, ruptured uterus, caesarean hysterectomies, destructive craniotomies, perinea I trauma, neonatal resuscitation, and had a session on lessons learnt in the field, in lecture, tutorial and lab sessions.

Having spent some time working with the ICRC in conflict areas of South Sudan and now in Afghanistan, I can say that this course was undeniably the best preparation available for working in an austere environment. I can commend this course to any surgeon considering working in rural and remote areas as well as those envisaging humanitarian work as a surgeon.