



Jonathan Bernstein

'Trainee Matters'
Section Co-ordinator

Jonathan Bernstein,
(MRCSEng, DOHNS),
ENT Specialist Registrar,
Victoria Hospital,
Blackpool, UK.



Nazia Munir

'Trainee Matters'
Section Co-ordinator

Nazia Munir,
(MRCS, DOHNS),
ENT Specialist Registrar,
Mersey Deanery,
Arrowe Park Hospital,
Wirral, UK.

Correspondence
Email: munirnazia@
hotmail.com

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Choosing a Temporal Bone Course

In Trainee Matters this issue David Pothier explores how to choose a temporal bone course. A selection of trainees was asked to choose a temporal dissection bone course they had attended, to describe the course, and to complete a questionnaire on factors considered important in choosing a temporal bone course.

Otology is a very esoteric surgical discipline with complex normal anatomy filling the surgical field with important structures that offer the potential for disaster if they are damaged. The skills required for otologic surgery are not easily transferred from any other surgical discipline and there are no simple temporal bone operations on which an aspiring otologist can cut their teeth. As a result, temporal bone surgery is something that can be an intimidating and daunting experience for trainees and trainers alike.

Temporal bone dissection courses are now ubiquitous and offer junior surgeons a chance to use equipment new to them such as high speed drills and high quality microscopes as well as to gain experience in identifying anatomical landmarks in the temporal bone. More senior trainees and accomplished otologists can hone their skills and try out new techniques. Given the number of temporal bone courses on the market and their notoriously uneven distribution in quality, the trainee is faced with the tricky task of selecting a temporal bone course that meets all of their needs but does not require the mugging of a little old lady to afford. Given the cutbacks in study budgets throughout the UK, value for money is becoming more and more of a factor in deciding which temporal bone course to choose. There are very few 'one size fits all' courses.

Most will concentrate on satisfying junior trainees and some are more focused on advanced dissection and assume that delegates already have substantial knowledge. Finding the right one for you is not always easy.

We have asked six delegates who have attended popular temporal bone courses across the world to let us know their experiences and tell us what the courses that they attended offered and how they felt as a trainee on the course. We also asked them to complete a questionnaire on what we consider important things for a temporal bone course to offer. Our criteria may also allow future delegates to see if a course they are considering attending offers what they want and if it seems to be of an appropriate standard for their individual training requirements.

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Cape temporal bone course

The Cape Town course is held over two and half days at the anatomy department of the University of Stellenbosch, some twenty minutes outside of the city centre. The faculty boasts two professors in James Look from Tygerberg and George Browning from Glasgow. Delegates are divided into a junior and senior group according to his / her previous experience in otology.

Two temporal bones, a right and left, are provided for each delegate for practical sessions. Each practical session is preceded by a live surgical demonstration projected onto a large screen. Interactive lectures on temporal bone anatomy, surgical technique, temporal bone radiology and decision making in otology put the learnt surgical skills into context.

The course is run excellently by a friendly and very experienced faculty. Two superb evening dinners and day time catering are hosted by the sponsors who help keep costs low and attract delegates from the UK, South Africa and Australasia. Overall this course certainly offers more value for money than any other sur-

gical course that I have attended. Furthermore, as it is held in spring in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, it's certainly worth considering learning to drill temporal bones in the shadow of Table Mountain.

Prof James Look explaining temporal bone anatomy to a delegate at the Cape temporal bone course.

