

## **BSDS Traveling Fellowship to Texas 2022**

I am very grateful to the BSDS for the opportunity to spend two weeks on an observership with Dr Stan Tolkachjov in Texas. Dr Tolkachjov is a board-certified Mohs micrographic & reconstructive surgeon and medical director for Epiphany Dermatology. He has performed over 13,000 cases throughout his career and contributed extensively to the literature of dermatological surgery.

One of the most striking aspects of my visit was the huge clinical workload which Dr Tolkachjov manages. On a daily basis he performs, with and without a pre-fellowship dermatologist who spends a year with Dr. Tolkachjov, 15-22 Mohs cases, multiple excisions, as well as seeing up to 10 general and cosmetic cases. As such, despite only spending 2 weeks in Texas I witnessed over 120 separate Mohs cases. This high workload was only feasible by the meticulous design of the practice which consisted of 12 individual clinic/theatre rooms. In addition, it was clear that Dr Tolkachjov's team, were highly trained and attuned to Dr Tolkachjov's needs, and not only took responsibility for recording consent and clinical notes, but also for the administration of local anaesthesia. This consultant/ clinician designed/led service maximised patient satisfaction, improved clinical efficiency and reduced bureaucratic inefficiency as well as provided a unique opportunity for Mohs trainees to see a huge work case in which they were expected to perform >1200 cases during their 12 month contract.

Dr Tolkachjov prides himself on his ability to reconstruct all of his defects. Combined with such a huge workload, I was fortunate enough to observe a variety of complex wound closures including numerous flaps (including ear interpolation and spiral flaps) and skin grafts. This was particularly interesting as Dr Tolkachjov not only used autologous skin grafts but also skin substitutes including a novel fish skin substitute (Kerecis) and a cadaveric human skin allograft (TheraSkin) for which he was a leading advocate for. I was fortunate enough not only to see these being used intraoperatively but also the post-operative follow-ups from previous patients in which it was clear that their use was a fantastic modality in his reconstructive repertoire.

Additionally, the practice also performed Mohs surgery with the aid of immunostaining for poorly differentiated squamous cell carcinomas, infiltrative BCCs, and lentigo maligna which I had not been exposed to previously. This highlighted the enormous utility of Mohs surgery beyond traditional BCCs. In addition to performing Mohs surgery, Dr Tolkachjov also treated several ear lobe Keloids during my attachment in which he would remove the lesion and intraoperatively inject corticosteroids before reconstruction (for earlobe Keloids), followed by immediate pressure earrings for at least 6 months and postoperative radiation.

As well as attending the busy 7.30am-6pm surgical schedule, I also had the opportunity to explore Texas. Dr Tolkachjov was kind enough to take myself and a further visiting Mohs consultant from the UK to the infamous Dallas School Book Depository, Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo, followed by an evening at Billy Bobs, a famous country and western music and rodeo venue. In addition, I will never forget the delights of eating Brisket at a Texan BBQ pit with a glass of ice tea/beer in the sweltering Texan heat (45°C+).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Tolkachjov, his lovely family and incredible staff for hosting me. These two weeks have shown me the capacity and breadth of treatment which dermatological surgery can have for our patients, and which we should strive for in the NHS.

