

22ND ASEAN Junior Traveling Fellowship Report

Larry V Acuña, Wilson Wang, Nino Nasution, Sharifah Roohi Ahmad, Piyachart Suttinark

The ASEAN Junior Traveling Fellowship programme was started 22 years ago with the intention of exchanging ideas and thus improving orthopaedic care in this region. It has achieved much more than that, fostering close ties between the ASEAN neighbouring countries and producing a legion of Orthopaedic surgeons with lasting friendships across the seas. For the 22nd traveling fellowship, the countries (in the order they were visited) were represented by:

Philippines	Dr Larry V Acuña
Singapore	Dr Wilson Wang
Indonesia	Dr Nino Nasution
Malaysia	Dr Sharifah Roohi Ahmad
Thailand	Dr Piyachart Suttinark.

The five-week fellowship started on the 12th of September, immediately after the Asia Pacific Orthopaedic Association Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur ended. This year the historical significance was having a lady orthopaedic surgeon in the junior programme for the first time. We all left from our respective countries and arrived in Manila on Sunday the 12th of September. The plan was to travel on Sunday, with one week in each of the five original countries. Each fellow became an ambassador for his or her own country – an euphemism for a tour guide! We didn't complain, however because we were very well taken care of. It was actually an all-expense paid holiday for five weeks, with a one week working condition that was more than



acceptable for us! We first met in Manila's four-star Discovery Hotel and experienced true Filipino hospitality.

The "boys" were given a three room suite while being the only girl in the entourage; I had the privilege of my own room. Although we were escorted, wined and dined like royalty, it was a tight schedule with 5 hospitals being covered as well as sight-seeing tours arranged for us

in between. There were 3 government and 2 private hospitals in the list, with a quick run through 2 medical colleges. Dr Rafael Bundoc took us on a historical tour of the Medical School of the University of Philippines which is steeped in colonial history. We listened enraptured as he described the storming of the school by the American forces and how the Filipino doctors and nurses were ruthlessly shot defending the hospital. The other well-known historical medical school was that of University of Sante Tomas, where our Filipino fellow, Dr Larry Acuña graduated from.



The Philippine General Hospital and Philippine Orthopedic Center were bustling with activity. The POC particularly is the largest orthopedic hospital in South East Asia, and possibly the world, with 700 beds! What struck us the most was the numerous patients housed in the ward on traction, awaiting finances and theatre time to proceed with their operation. This center was replete with a spine ward, hand ward, physical therapy & brace units amongst others:



Everyone was enraptured with the practicality of CMR by finger traps done conveniently in the emergency ward!!

Training of the residents is taken very seriously with comprehensive training sessions, a strict Chief resident, implementation of demerit points and penalty weekend calls for errant doctors! Watchout Malaysian residents...



Of course it was not all work... we were well fed in the nicest of restaurants.



In **contrast** to the government hospitals (bottom left), were the private centers (bottom right) providing orthopedic care in comfort. Of course, there's a price to pay! What I found remarkable was that even in the private centers, there were orthopedic residents, research in abundance and provision for charity cases, food for thought indeed.



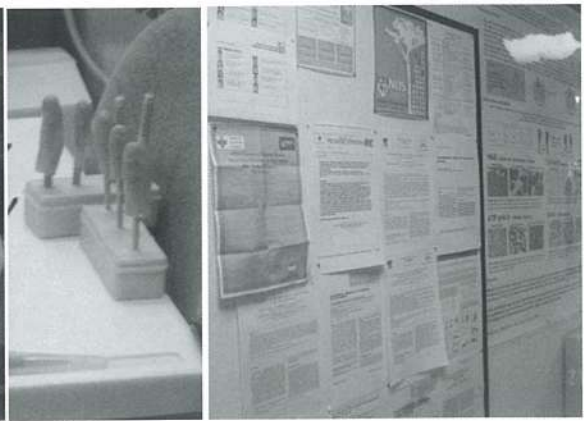
And the tour of the Philippines ended with the story of the legendary José Rizal - a national hero- in Intramuros, the city within the walls, by our most enigmatic tour guide, George:



The next stop was **Singapore** and we were housed in Orchard Towers, a nice 4-star hotel right off Orchard Road, enabling us to “stimulate” the Singapore economy as Wilson (our Singapore counterpart) put it. As there was some construction going on in the hotel, it was very noisy and we managed to get upgraded as well as wrangle a free dinner!! We had a tight schedule to follow starting off with dinner at the American club with Dr Ong Leong Boon, the Secretary General of the Asean Orthopedic Association followed by two presentations minimum at each hospital. On Monday we were all impressed with the technology and sparkling interior of Singapore General Hospital! We were cordially invited into theatre where we witnessed cervical disc replacement surgery as well as computer guided joint replacement. Dr Inderjeet was master-minding a bad pelvic fracture. A hectic day at work was followed by dinner at an Irish pub.



The next day we were to tour the other giant, National University Hospital, or NUH for short. We met up with Prof Wong Hee Kit, Head of Department of Orthopedics as well as Prof Robert Pho, who enjoyed reminiscing with us with a backdrop of the department research projects.



We visited the prosthetic centre where Mr Leow showed us the fine tuning required in prosthetic fitting for fingers and hands, the gait laboratory, the biomechanics lab and tissue engineering labs housed in the Clinical Research Centre where we realised the importance of persistence and emphasis placed on research. The musculoskeletal research laboratory was a shining example of hard work and ingenuity producing numerous articles in various international journals.

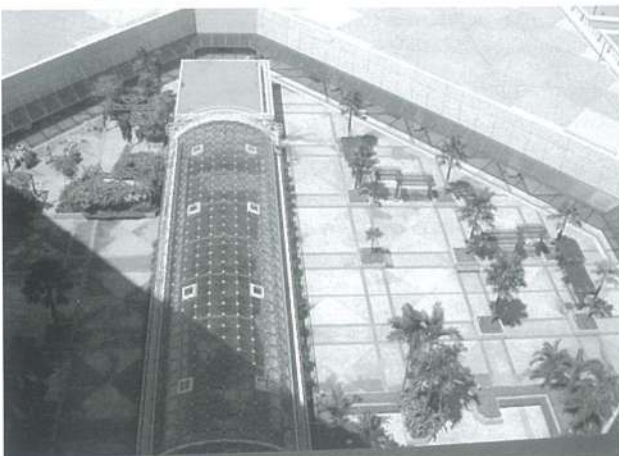
On Wednesday we started our marathon of two hospitals in a day, visiting the epitome of modernization, Tan Tock Seng Hospital (left) and the garden hospital, Alexandra (right).



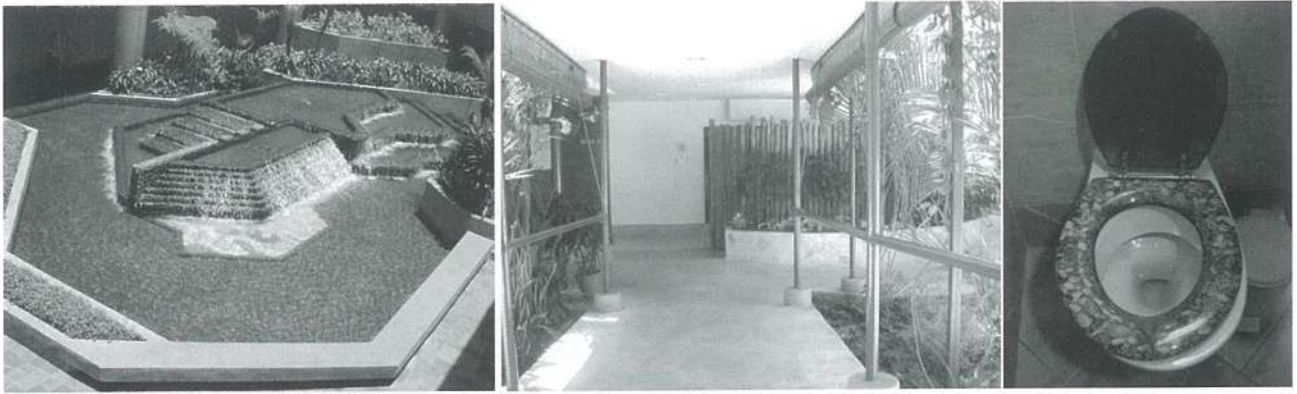
Tan Tock Seng was established in 1844 and is steeped in history, having its own museum and curator! We saw old suction pumps, irons, the cholera bed, numerous old coins and many items long forgotten. An antique piano is what Piyachart fell in love with!



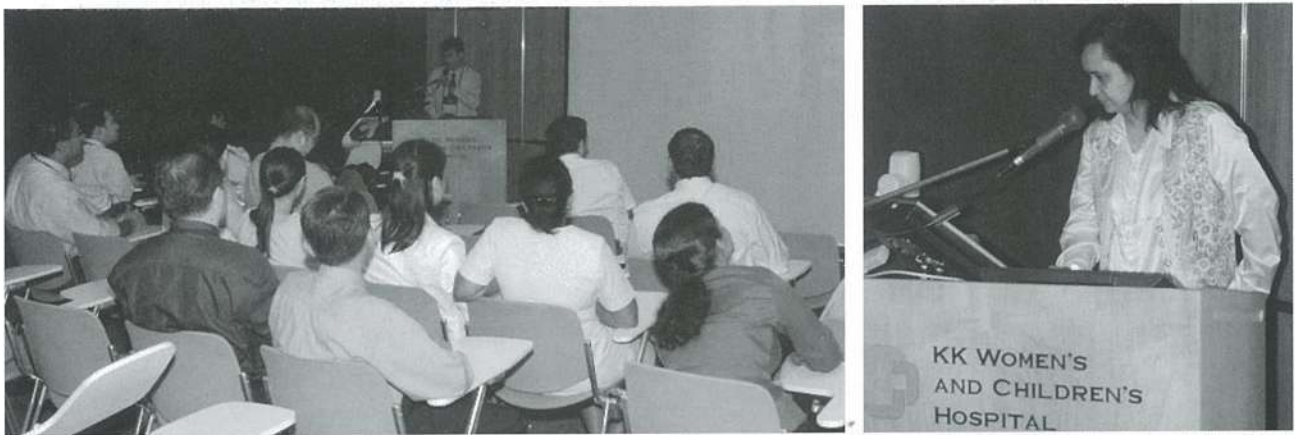
The **modern facilities** of this hospital were amazing. Up-to-date equipment such as automated food delivery vehicles, well thought-out layout, and full gym and extra-curricular activity facilities which made Wilson envious!



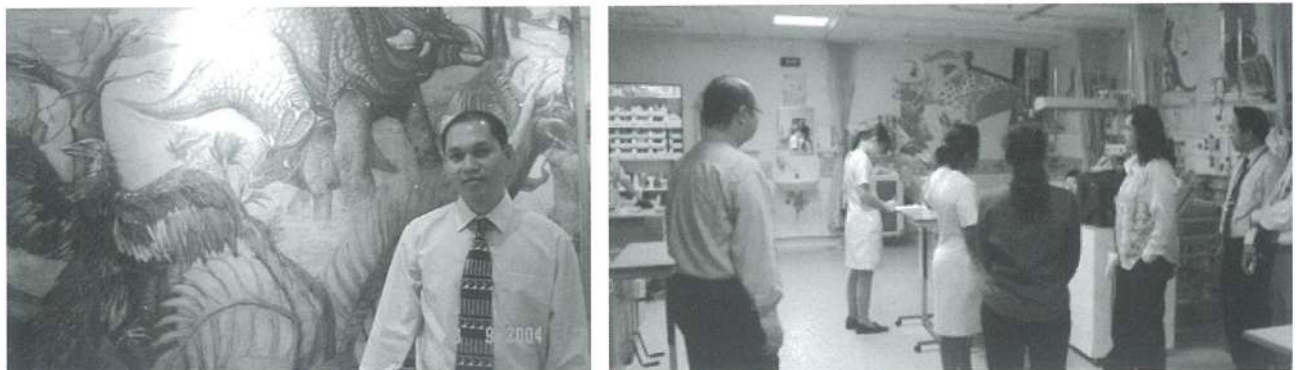
Alexandra Hospital is the most environment friendly and greenest hospital, with garden concept lavatories and butterflies in their corridors!



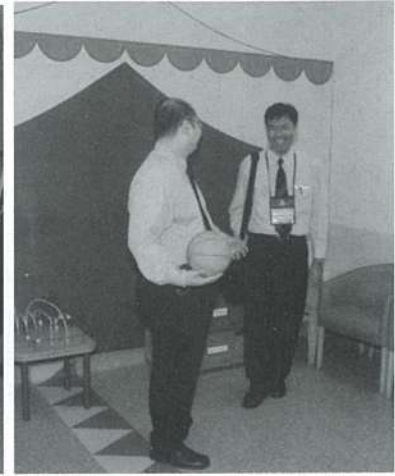
This was followed on Thursday with **Kandang Kerbau Women's and Children's Hospital** or **KKWCH** for short. Two of us presented there to an attentive audience on paediatric topics. Piyachart's was supracondylar fractures of the humerus and mine was management of the cerebral palsy child. We did do *some* work!



It was also a time for meeting up old friends, exchanging cards and ideas. It was also the liveliest and most colourful hospital with all the walls painted in lovely murals, a different theme for each floor. Larry just didn't want to leave. The tour was conducted by one of the sisters, who did a superb job.



We also were lucky to get an inside view of one of the automated food delivery vehicles. Of course some were more interested in the toys available there!



The clinics also had an excellent layout and the hydrotherapy pool was enticing!



The last working day was spent in Changi General Hospital and the last few of our presentations in Singapore – as you can see the tensions faded away and we were more relaxed.

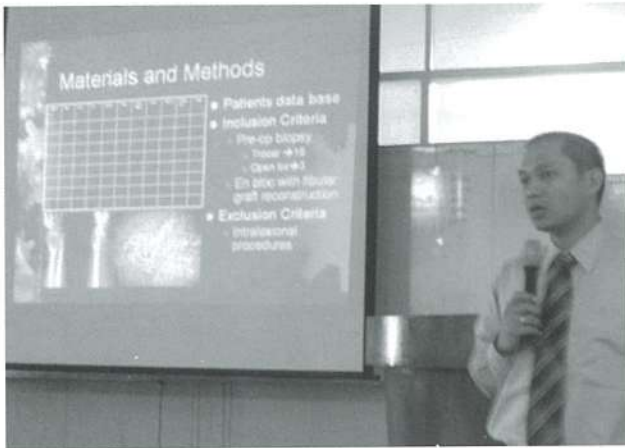


The Night Safari was absolutely fantastic as was the dinner at Wilson's home. It was a great ending to the Singapore trip and Wilson was reasonably relieved with our contented faces. At the airport, poor Piyachart was detained because he had less than 6 months' validity on his passport. After sorting it out, he arrived in Medan a couple of days later.

In Medan, we basically had a nice break after the hectic schedule earlier and visited two hospitals with only 3 presentations for both. One was almost cancelled because we couldn't get the appropriate cable! None of us was complaining! On Monday we visited Adam Malik General Hospital or Rumah Sakit Umum, RSU for short. We were plied with coffee frequently and quickly got addicted to the strong brew...and no it did not contain any alcohol, right?



Larry presented his study on resection and non-vascularized fibular reconstruction for giant cell tumors of the distal radius, which was well received, also by now well practiced! Piyachart gave his experience on reduction of supracondylar fractures in children by the “milking” technique, resulting in lower radiation exposures and shorter theatre time. The Indonesians were totally absorbed and extremely interested! He was later inundated with questions.



As we compared hospitals, we noticed contrasting facilities at some places but mostly the infrastructure was crumbling. It was noted that the French had contributed to the buildings but they could not be maintained. Thus RSU Adam Malik was well built with nice wide corridors and clean white tiles which were easier to maintain, and people could even sit on the floor.



Pirngadi hospital was a two-storey structure that was being replaced by an eight-storey new building behind the old hospital in the hope of providing better care.



* Lunch that day was Nasi Padang, Medan style! Dishes were just piled up and we only paid for those that we ate. Even Wilson was awed.



After Pirngadi hospital we were taken in a minivan to Brestagi, a hill resort on the way to Lake Toba. The waterfall there was breathtaking and Piyachart and Nino went all the way down to the base, which was a good mile's trek.



We stayed at Hotel Parapat on the shores of Lake Toba and the views were picture postcard perfect!!



Larry, Wilson and I remained behind up at the top enjoying the scenery, taking as many pictures as we could without being able to fully capture the glory of the lake and its surroundings. I did find some quaint shops and got some bargains!



Alas, we had to descend after those relaxing couple of days and face reality. We came down to Medan and did some sight-seeing and shopping, and on farewell night celebrated Larry's birthday.



After our meeting with Dr Seto, our marathon began. We took a whirlwind tour around Penang GH, followed by a sumptuous lunch, by which time we were all ready for a nap. I guess our journey had worn us out. Penang GH had a small display cabinet housing some historical artifacts, which, although not as extensive as TTSH in Singapore, did hold its own.



Second last leg was in **Malaysia**, and here we truly had a traveling fellowship. We flew from Medan to KL and then Penang. From Penang, we stayed one night in each state and visited each General hospital of that state. Thus on Monday it was Penang, followed by Alor Setar then Ipoh. Here is our terminal transit train at KLIA.



We saw on our way, both the "old" as well as the "new" Penang. We stayed the night, experienced the "night market" and took the ferry across to the mainland.

Alor Setar was more laid back and we had a nice long chat with Dato' Dr Suresh Chopra, who's the head of the Orthopaedic Unit there. He told us how he built up

the arthroplasty unit there and has 5-10 cases per week. The tallest structure in that town was the Alor Setar Tower, which gave us a very nice bird's eye view for miles.



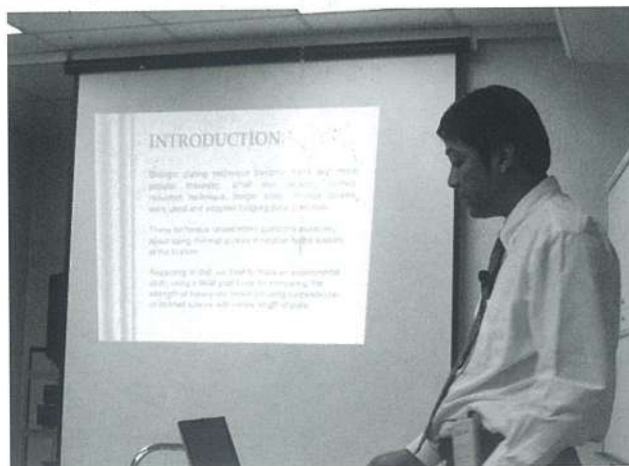
After lunch we moved onto Ipoh, eager to beat the evening jam when we reach there.



Ipoh GH was typical of a busy government hospital. The boys were impressed with the excellent highways and also health infrastructure of our country. The free implants in those hospitals also raised eyebrows.

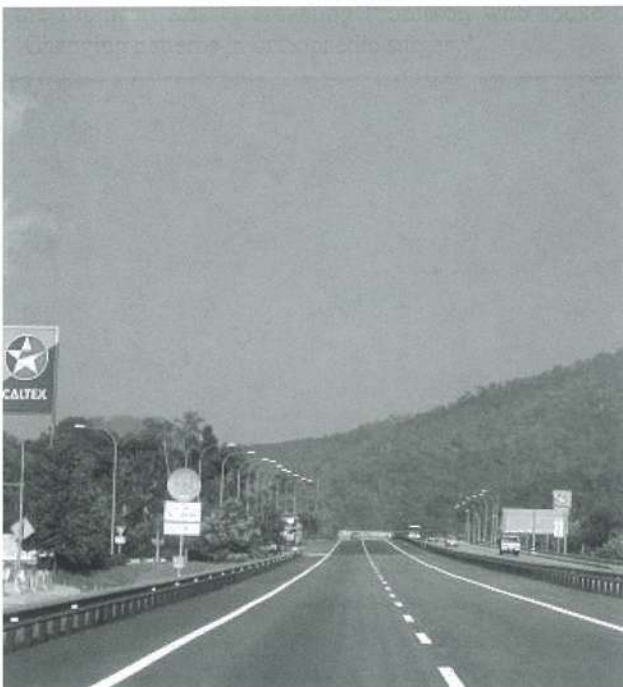


Nino presented on the biomechanical strength comparison between straight and inclined screw fixation in plating of fractures. After a short lunch, we went to Dr Wong Hee Kit's place for tea.





Then it was a drive back to Kuala Lumpur, or KL.



Checking into PJ Hilton, the boys had a short rest before we went on a night tour of KL, first dinner, a cultural show followed by the world famous KL Tower. Here the nocturnal view of KL as well as the Twin towers was spectacular.



Before we started on our hectic schedule of 2 major hospitals in a day, we visited the Twin towers and did a spot of KL sight-seeing and bargain hunting. Then it was on to business. We were all impressed with University Hospital's facilities, especially the helipad. It was huge in size and the considerations that went into its being were interesting. The Accident and Emergency facilities were state of the art too.



The afternoon visit was to HUKM and after Larry gave his discourse, and we had toured as much of the hospital as possible, tea was served and we had some light discussion.



The next day we were off to see the massive KL General Hospital after its facelift. The clinic looked immense. Everyone was very comfortable in the lounge chairs during the briefing of the history of the hospital. Probably the largest group photograph was taken after that and we said goodbye to KL.



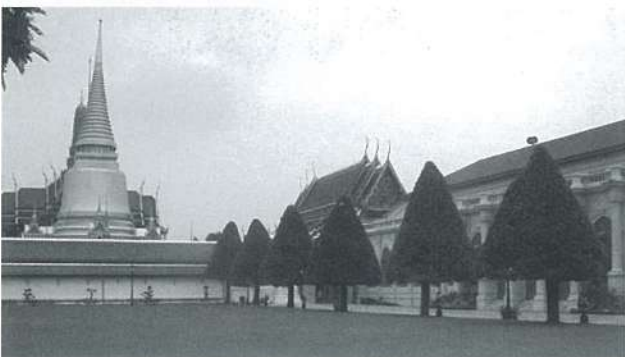
Hello to Bangkok, where we stayed for a couple of days before leaving to Pattaya where the AOA meeting was held. Both the Bangkok hospitals we visited that is Norparatrajathanee hospital and Siriraj hospital, were well maintained. They had good facilities and adequate equipment. Their techniques and knowledge were well advanced. They were crowded though



Siriraj Hospital is the only hospital which has a river emergency entrance! The new building was conceptualised by the late Prince Mahidol and brought to fruition. In the picture on the right, below, the river boat can be seen between the archway.



On the third day, we started out early for Pattaya, where our conference venue was, but not before visiting some of the temples and the Royal Palace.



In Pattaya, we stayed next to the Royal Cliff, and enjoyed our neighbours' view. The opening ceremony was grand and graced by her highness the Princess. The tumour course was very good but I was called to attend the AOA council meeting and hence unfortunately had to forego most of it. We were also entertained to an enchanting cultural show.



We all gave our talks to a lunch crowd, shortened to barely 6 minutes each because an earlier speaker had overshot time. Hurriedly we gulped our lunches and left the hall to walk the exhibition hall.

The first day of the fasting month fell on the 15th and the two of us Moslems survived by buying packet food from the local grocery store. We were lucky to have that store within walking distance. The ceremonial dinner fell on that same day and we had to bear a whole piglet being served to us on the dinner table. All the food had pork or bacon in it and it became too much for us to bear and so three of us left to have a seafood dinner. The POA President invited Larry so he stayed behind. The next day we all traveled back to Bangkok and stayed in the wonderful hotel. We were all tired and needed our rest; however we did venture to try out the Thai light rail system and their famous massage.

All in all, it was a wonderful experience and we did enjoy each others' company. It is a great feeling to be able to go and visit friends in a neighbouring country and a great learning experience, not just of orthopedics, but of cultures, thoughts, behaviour and thinking of the ASEAN nations. I shall always treasure those memories and friendships