

The Arthroscopy Association of North America Advanced Arthroscopy Traveling Fellowship: A 10-Year History



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Abstract: In its brief 10-year existence, the Arthroscopy Association of North America Advanced Arthroscopy Traveling Fellowship has quickly established itself as the paramount educational experience for aspiring young surgeons in sports medicine and arthroscopy. The Traveling Fellowship is structured as a 10-day experience with visits to 3 host sites and culminates at the AANA Annual Meeting. With 4 selected fellows and an honorary “Godfather,” the Traveling Fellowship affords a unique and invaluable opportunity to forge enduring friendships and rare mentorships with established leaders in the field of Arthroscopy. Potential applicants can anticipate not only developing their surgical acumen and aspects of clinical practice, but also assimilating key leadership skills, pearls on work-life balance, and a broader commitment to life-long education. The Dr. Don Johnson AANA Traveling Fellowship Alumni Group, named in honor of the two-time godfather and AANA Past President, represent an emerging class of leaders within AANA who are poised to contribute immensely to its mission of continuing medical education and collaboration.

The framework of graduate medical education has evolved dramatically over the past century, and the terms under which formal surgical training occurs has become increasingly regimented and heavily regulated. Words like “competency” and “proficiency” have entered our collective lexicon, and the next generation of emerging orthopaedic surgeons will be critically evaluated based on objective criteria and sophisticated assessment tools such as simulation software and case-based learning.¹⁻³ However, despite this transformation, opportunities for continuing medical education and further professional development remain unexamined. Active orthopaedic surgeons are continually seeking alternatives to the traditional subspecialty meeting format, particularly those that embrace a more interactive and hands-on forum without significant financial cost.

Amid these other options, traveling fellowships (TFs) offer the ideal mixture of a traditional apprenticeship model with a more contemporary and dynamic structure. In an era where e-mail and text messaging are supplanting meaningful face-to-face interactions, a mini-fellowship such as that offered by the Arthroscopy Association of North America (AANA), fosters rich collegial relationships among its participants and invaluable access to senior mentors and established leaders in the field of sports medicine. As a voluntary and merit-based experience, these opportunities reinforce a dedication to life-long learning and allow individuals to truly tailor the experience to their educational needs. In the late 1990s, AANA promoted and supported a self-designed traveling fellowship, which provided one international surgeon per year the opportunity to visit leading arthroscopy experts in the United States.^{4,5} A formal traveling fellowship for North American Surgeons (the AANA Advanced Arthroscopy Traveling Fellowship) came into existence approximately 10 years later. The purpose of this article is to trace the rich history of the AANA Advanced Arthroscopy Traveling Fellowship and its participants, while elaborating on the immediate and intangible benefits of this experience.

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Fig 1. (A) John Richmond, M.D. (B) Patrick St. Pierre, M.D. (C) Mark Getelman, M.D. Photos courtesy of AANA.

History

In 2005, the AANA board of directors proposed the idea of creating a TF that would allow fellows to visit and learn from leading experts in shoulder arthroscopy throughout North America. Dr. John Richmond (Fig 1), Chairman of the Fellowship committee at the time, assumed the responsibility of implementing its design and execution. Drs. Patrick St. Pierre and Mark Getelman (Fig 1) also joined the newly named TF Subcommittee, charged with the goal of unveiling a fellowship during the 2006 Annual Meeting. Given the recent boom in arthroscopic shoulder procedures, the AANA TF was initially developed as the AANA Shoulder Arthroscopy TF. With input from the inaugural traveling fellows and host faculty from the different sites, AANA quickly modified the fellowship to allow for incorporation and broader exposure to a variety of large- and small-joint arthroscopic procedures.⁶

In its subsequent iteration in 2007, AANA relaunched this opportunity as the Advanced Arthroscopy TF for sports medicine and shoulder surgeons from the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The AANA TF subcommittee originally conceived the fellowship as a 6-site rotation that would be repeated every 3 years. Each site visit lasted between 3-4 days, thereby creating a 3½ week TF that culminated in the final week at the Annual Meeting.⁶ This format persisted until 2011, when the structure of the fellowship was abbreviated to 2 weeks and 3 host sites to better accommodate practice demands and create a more concentrated educational experience (Table 1). In 2012, the number of fellowship selections were expanded from 3 to 4 positions in response to increasing demand.

Current Fellowship Structure

An honorary “Godfather,” a renowned educator and authority in the field of arthroscopy, is appointed each

year to accompany the 4 traveling fellows on a 10-day tour of 3 host sites. Potential sites are selected by the AANA Fellowship Committee based on a formal application process and proximity to the Annual Meeting site, which typically alternates between the Western, Midwest/Central, and Eastern regions of the United States. The selected institutions represent a diverse array of clinical settings, including both academic university programs and private community practices. Each host sponsor is responsible for creating a program for the traveling fellows, which typically includes a tour of the institution, exposure to operative cases, clinics, labs, didactic presentations, and local social or cultural events. The fellows also participate actively in scientific symposia at the different educational sites, often giving 2 to 3 15-minute presentations during the course of the fellowship on their past and present research or niche areas of interest.

Goals

This fellowship provides the traveling fellows with the opportunity to observe leading surgeons in the fields of sports medicine and arthroscopy. It also promotes intellectual exchange through both formal and informal discussions, research presentations, and skills sessions. The TF seeks to identify future leaders in arthroscopy, to promote camaraderie among the fellows, and to facilitate networking with expert surgeons in sports medicine and shoulder surgery.

The TF also sets out to identify future leaders within the fields of arthroscopy and sports medicine while promoting AANA’s mission to develop and disseminate critical knowledge. During the 10-day experience, there is a significant focus on the “intangibles”— leadership skills, work-life balance, and life lessons. Traits of an effective leader (humility, confidence, communication,

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