

A report written by Justs Sauka, M.D. about the fellowship

I discovered this fellowship while looking for a microsurgery or free flap course at TAYS as per suggestion of my colleague who had attended these courses. After reading reports from the previous fellows in hand surgery that are available on the official TAYS webpage, I decided to take my chances and apply for the fellowship programme, especially given Finland's good reputation for hand surgery. The interview process went smoothly, thanks to the fellowship director, Olli Leppänen, MD, who was very punctual and helpful in addressing all my questions. Throughout my stay, Dr. Leppänen and other colleagues ensured that everything went smoothly.

If you are the lucky candidate who has been selected as the next fellow surgeon, it is important to start looking for the rental apartment or a housing as soon as possible. I recommend contacting Kiissantassu Kodit. As I understood, many healthcare workers from Tays have lived at Kiissantassu facilities at some point. The apartment that I stayed during the fellowship was well maintained, conveniently located near the hospital and grocery stores, and even included a sauna in the basement. Simultaneously, I would also advise to obtaining Finnish Personal identity code (via Migri) and tax card (via Vero). I suggest starting with Finnish Personal identity code. Since my country's Finnish consulate did not issue these documents, I obtained both after arriving in Finland. I suggest arriving in Finland at least a week before the fellowship starts. While it is not mandatory to have a Finnish bank account and phone number, they make life much easier in Finland, as most of internet providers, insurance companies require them.

As a means of commuting, I chose to rely on bicycle. The infrastructure is well developed for cycling. On days when it rained heavily or roads were icy, I switched to other means of commuting since my bike lacked studded tires. However, for the locals the conditions did not hold them back from commuting in winter on the bicycle. For those who prefer other methods, the public transportation in Tampere is efficient and will take you to most places. Trams and buses are running punctually. Parking a car near the hospital is an option, though it comes with additional costs.

At the hospital you will receive a locker and have access to surgical scrubs, and lab coats that can be changed daily. Most of the colleagues stick to scrubs and warm jacket, reserving the lab



coats for outpatient clinic days. Bring comfortable footwear suitable for both clinic and operating theatre use, such as surgical clogs or sneakers.

To fully assist and perform any procedures in surgeries it is essential to have your own surgical loupes.

If you have any research project ideas you could consult with Professor Jarkko Jokihara before your fellowship, and it is also possible to do that research project while you're doing your fellowship. In my case, I am not fluent in Finnish, which was a setback for getting involved in any research project. However, the professor was willing to hear any research ideas and provided valuable feedback.

Almost every Friday, residents prepared a scientific presentation. All the scientific presentations were useful and supported up by recent scientific publications. Fellows are expected to make a scientific presentation on a topic that the fellow wish to present or one was suggested by the professor.

You are expected to be at work around 7:30 every morning. The day usually begins with the planned case analysis that will be operated on, it may be displayed on a big screen in the office or discussed in between the colleagues on their workstation. Every Tuesday and Friday there is a case analysis. Participating in the case analysis meetings was very useful, since you could discuss with experienced colleagues about the indications for the procedures, techniques that were used during the procedure, expected outcomes, and rehabilitation protocols. After the morning meetings, you can join any surgery that interests you the most for that day. Usually, you may choose between three operation theatres to assist or observe, depending on how many surgeons are involved. The workday usually ended at 15:00.

The summer months primarily involved acute surgical cases due to specialists being on vacation. The cases usually consisted of seasonal traumas, such as laceration injuries, bone fractures of the hand, and occasionally revascularization cases caused by wood chopping or splintering accidents. On my first week there was a finger revascularization. These cases allowed to gain more experience in suturing flexor and extensor tendon and nerve injuries. It is advisable to familiarize yourself with the local guidelines for it may help you with understanding the patient treatment at TAYS hand surgery unit. After most specialists came back from summer vacation the elective cases were planned. At least once a month, there was Erb's palsy or brachial plexus-related surgery were colleagues performed nerve transfer, muscle transfer, or

nerve graft interpositions. It is possible to join the specialist on a day dedicated to rheumatoid hand, which are performed in another department. Procedures such as MCP resection, arthroplasty with prosthesis spacers, and soft tissue balancing. Most of the surgeons perform PIP, DIP and MCP arthrodesis with either headless screws, or Kirschner wires and cerclage. I gained significant experience and knowledge from the wrist surgeons who were performing wrist arthroscopies, partial wrist fusions, PRCs, Radio-scapho-lunate fusions, Chamay procedures, Darrach procedures, ANAFAB procedure, and more. It is also possible to participate in paediatric hand surgery procedures, where there were either congenital deformities or acquired injuries. In TAYS, an elbow arthroscopy is performed by hand surgeons. It is also possible to join sarcoma team, which usually consists of plastic, orthopaedic, and hand surgeons.

At the Department of Musculoskeletal Diseases a lot of times plastic surgeons, orthopaedic surgeons, and hand surgeons work together in a multidisciplinary team approach. For example, if there is a mangled hand and there is a complex elbow joint injury, both orthopaedic and hand surgeons are working together. If there is a necessity for a soft tissue coverage, plastic surgeons collaborate as well. So, it is also possible to gain an experience in how multidisciplinary team should work when handling a complicated case.

It is useful to check the on-call schedule. When possible, I stayed in the hospital for on-call cases. It is not mandatory to stay for the emergency cases, but they really appreciate if you do. Often, I asked them to call me if there was any emergency case so that I could drive from home. Another option was to write your name on the on-call shift next to the surgeon's name so that they know that you are willing to assist in acute surgical cases.

If you get a hospital's profile for the work computer, you will be able to get an access to most of the scientific journals. This was useful to me since most of the colleagues could suggest me an article to read, and before a specific case, I could review latest scientific articles on the subject. In the hand surgeon's office, you will find a lot of literature related to hand surgery, for example, Green's Operative Hand Surgery.

In TAYS, hand surgery residents receive excellent training from attendings, senior residents, and consultants. When I had the opportunity to perform during the surgeries, I felt like fully integrated as a trainee.

I had the chance to participate in the microsurgery course. The course is well organised, and the specialists in the course are experienced surgeons in the field. The facility where it was held was modern. The microscopes worked well, and the surgical instruments used during the course were well-maintained. The other participants of the course were plastic/reconstructive surgery residents from Helsinki University Hospital. It is always a good opportunity to meet new colleagues in courses, exchange ideas. Before the course, it was possible to practise simple microsurgical suturing with a microscope that is in the hand surgeon's office. I strongly recommend this course.

Tampere offers many great ways to spend your free time for all kinds of interests and activities. From cultural events to outdoor activities. The city is located not far from Turku and Helsinki, so you can plan your weekend getaways. During summer and autumn seasons, I hiked few times in the national parks that are within driving distance from Tampere. My favourite one was Isojärvi National Park. It is approximately 2-hour drive from Tampere and you can make it a two day hike trip. It is easy to find other national parks on an official web page (via nationalparks.fi)

Tampere offers lot of public saunas spots, as it is known as the sauna capital of Finland. From all the saunas, my favourite one was Kaukajärven sauna.

I must mention that the colleagues at operation theatre and ward at TAYS were polite and professional. During my fellowship, I spent most of my time in the operating theatres, and their teamwork and respect towards each other contributed to enjoyable work environment.

From my fellowship at TAYS, I gained not only surgical knowledge and skills but also lot of meaningful connections with colleagues. I recommend this fellowship at TAYS to anyone whose is seeking to advance their expertise in hand surgery but also to enjoy welcoming and professional atmosphere.