

“Before, every new consultant would join a travelling society...”; hearing these words on the train from Glasgow to Edinburgh from one of the most senior surgeons in the hospital stimulated my curiosity. It was only natural that I enthusiastically seized the opportunity to apply for the Price Thomas Travelling Fellowship this year. From there on, I can only describe my experience with the Travelling Surgical Society of Great Britain and Ireland as a privilege and a delight.

Everything is extremely well organised with Prof Ellis as secretary assuring planning of the scientific activities and communication amongst members. Ms Cole from Jon Baines made sure that all travel requirements were catered for (pampered- would be a more accurate description).

I prepared my talks, bid chilly Glasgow farewell and *viva España!*

My first encounter with the group was at Heathrow and I knew that I had just been admitted to an elite club of kindness and humanity. Every person in the group opens a new horizon, the journey had commenced.

The week is organised so that sightseeing intermingles with the scientific activities. The talks were hosted in reputable Madrilian hospitals but themed to involve different surgical specialties (and an unforgettable recite of Uncle Sydney’s radioactive watch). One might be sceptic of the “compatibility” of different surgeons but it was like feasting on a meal of many flavours. Indeed one of my talks was on PITA CABG, but as my audience quickly found out, the culinary reference was short-lived.

I have learned much about stained glass windows, Spanish monarchy, Toledo, El Greco... and the list doesn’t even include surgical knowledge. The cultural events offered a nice balance to a heavily charged scientific program and made those few days, a most enriching experience. Some of the more pleasurable moments I was to have were the chats with the wives of the other surgeons. My only regret was that my wife was not with me and missed out on meeting a group of wonderful people. I would strongly encourage any future fellow to be accompanied.

“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.” I would happily return with my wife and read many more pages with the TSS.

Professor Nawwar Al-Attar

Price Thomas Travelling Fellow 2015