



Linking Up with American Partners in Head and Neck Cancer Treatment

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Background

The Clinic of Otorinolaryngology and Head & Neck Surgery of St. Anne's Faculty Hospital at Masaryk University where I have worked since 2002 is a leading Czech center in head and neck cancer research and treatment. We treat over 200 newly diagnosed patients each year in addition to regular follow-ups with patients. Patients from many hospitals not only in the region, but from whole Czech Republic, are sent to our multidisciplinary oncological board either for treatment at our clinic or for recommendation of further treatment in other hospitals.

I am a young head and neck surgeon shortly after earning my Ph.D. My clinical and scientific interest corresponds with the dominant focus of our clinic. I mostly deal with cancer patients in both my clinical work and research. I presented my results at more than 40 congresses and conferences. My results were always well accepted and usually lead to lasting scientific discussions. In addition, I published several articles in scientific magazines with citation impact. In the moment I am leading a research team of 6 specialists (geneticists, biochemist, and clinicians).

In addition to clinical work, I participate on research projects mostly focusing on head and neck cancer diagnostics and treatment. My last research grant lead to description of 2 new oncomarkers. Due to these newly discovered markers we can identify patients with neck metastases who should be indicated for more radical treatment earlier than ever before. Using the same technique patients without neck metastases could be saved from very exhausting, demanding, time consuming and costly therapy. The second oncomarker my team discovered functions as a prognostic tool of cancer recurrence. Early diagnosis of recurrence leads to better prognosis due to early beginning of treatment. Recently I gained new governmental grant from The Ministry of Health of Czech Republic in order to prove general value of these oncomarkers in clinical practice. The above mentioned research grant of the Czech Grant Agency got best possible final evaluation and has been published in an international medical journal.

I actively participate in community activities. I was recently elected Vice-president of the Executive Board of the Young Otorinolaryngologists Department of the Czech Society for ENT and Head and Neck Surgery of J. E. Purkyne. I am the youngest member of the Board. We organize congresses for otorinolaryngologists at the beginning of their scientific career. We encourage them to discuss clinical issues and to cooperate on joint research in the Czech Republic and abroad. I already left the position of local representative of The International Federation of Medical Students Association at The Faculty of Medicine of Masaryk University. I was responsible for helping foreign medical students organize their medical rotations in Brno hospitals. Similarly, we assisted our students applying for rotations abroad.

Another important community activity was cooperation with The Public Health for Moravia Foundation (Nadace Zdraví pro Moravu) in improving public awareness and knowledge about head and neck cancer. The preventive measures including publishing of information leaflets and booklets about first signs of head and neck cancer were intended to shorten a period between the first manifestation of cancer and the beginning of the treatment by bringing symptomatic patients to specialists as soon as possible.

Postgraduate training of Czech physicians is problematic due to repeated changes of requirements for specialization examinations. Other reasons making clinical training of a young surgeon in our country problematic are various disputes among doctors and their professional organizations. Experienced specialists feel too tired and too "abused" to teach young generation.

However, I am convinced that medical professionals with foreign training will be needed to stabilize the Czech healthcare services.

American Partners

The Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) is a worldwide leader in otorhinolaryngology and head and neck surgery. In MSKCC, Hayes Martin M.D. founded the specialty of head and neck surgery in 1934. Professor Jatin P. Shah, probably the most respected head and neck surgeon in the world, is the current chief of head and neck service in MSKCC. He is the author of several text books and atlases of head and neck oncological surgery. His last book "Head and Neck Surgery and Oncology" became the "Bible" of all head and neck surgeons. Additionally, he is the President of the International Federation of Head and Neck Oncologic Societies (IFHNOS) which associates almost all national oncosurgical societies. The IFHNOS under professor Shah is turning its welcoming face to education of ENT surgeons. Professor Shah played an important role in creating and further developing system of postgraduate education in head and neck surgery that guarantees to each applicant to become self-sufficient and self-confident surgeon after completing fellowship program. European leaders in the field jealously look across the Atlantic Ocean to this well-functioning system of education. The executive board of IFHNOS realized that the only way to ensure high level of treatment and research in head and neck oncology for the future is a systematic training of medical professionals. On the 3rd World Congress of IFHNOS held in Prague in 2006, professor Shah came with an initiative to adapt the US fellowship program to European specifics. This recently accepted task should hopefully soon result in opening fellowship positions in Europe. Till opening the first fellowship program in any European institution, young surgeons building their careers are supposed to focus their interest on US institutions like MSKCC.

MSKCC proves its exceptional position by setting own standards and guidelines for the treatment of head and neck cancer. These standards are generally widely accepted and routinely used at many hospitals worldwide, since these diagnostic and therapeutic guidelines are based on numerous randomized trials performed directly at MSKCC and other cooperating institutions. Their results are regularly published in the most renowned scientific journals. Their lectures and papers are discussed at various international congresses.

What is so special about this hospital? Even though their primary focus is on diagnostics and treatment of oncological patients, education is a vital part of MSKCC's daily mission. Their fellowships, training and education programs prepare physicians and scientists for leadership roles in the care of cancer patients around the world. Among many other activities, it is a part of this mission to participate in organizing medical seminars for doctors from all around the world. The activity of MSKCC as a part of the Cornell University, New York, directed to young doctors from Europe is a medical seminar held in Salzburg. Annually 30-40 doctors from European countries are invited to attend lectures by leaders in ENT subspecializations. Doctors from MSKCC and invited speakers mostly from USA regularly give lectures in Salzburg. Professor Shah arrived to the last seminar that was organized in June 2007. In addition to his presentations, he did his best in order to stay with us, young otorhinolaryngologists as long as possible. He was more than happy to answer hundreds and hundreds of our questions. Once as he was having dinner, we wanted to give him a break. Immediately, he started to complain if there is nothing else we wanted to ask about. He reminded us to use every moment of the time we could spend with him. After our long discussions professor Shah approached me and invited me to come as a visiting fellow to MSKCC. It was an incredible honor for me. I believe that visiting MSKCC represents surely unrepeatable opportunity for rapid advance in my clinical and scientific career.

Actually, the best way how to learn from professor Shah is to visit him and his team at his home hospital. The proposed internship program is the best way to get insight of diagnostic and treatment strategies used there. Even the name Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center reminds us of their dominant focus on therapy of all kinds of cancer.

Objectives

Objective of my project is to establish a link between the MSKCC as a center of excellence in head and neck cancer and Clinic of Otorinolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery of St. Anne's Faculty Hospital at Masaryk University. This cooperation could lead to joint research and study projects parallel to the existing link with Mayo clinic, Rochester. The established cooperation focusing on invasive cardiology leads to building of the International Clinical Research Center (ICRC) at the grounds of our hospital.

From patients' point of view, this cooperation could offer our patients the most advanced and the most sophisticated methods of treatment and medications sooner than the international pharmaceuticals companies would intend to introduce them to the small Czech market. From the scientific point of view, this cooperation could enable our doctors to perform state-of-art research and publish articles in scientific journals with high impact factors.

Modern randomized studies in order to offer sufficient statistical significance need to include hundreds to thousands of patients. Therefore, even a hospital with a size of MSKCC needs to cooperate with other institutions. This cooperation is usually international. It is based on personal trust. I believe that my visit to MSKCC could prove our readiness and willingness for such cooperation. I could show that our hospitals (specifically our ENT clinic) could offer reliable personal and technical equipment for modern research.

Detailed Description and Time Schedule

The planned clinical observership program will take place in Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York City in the autumn of this year. The observership itself combines theoretical internship with clinical training. The theoretical part will include clinical discussions at conferences, teaching sessions, and deductions for oncological therapy during ambulatory care sessions. The practical part will mostly take place at operation rooms where I will have the opportunity to observe techniques used for various surgical procedures. I am invited by professor J. Shah between September 8 and November 28, 2008. I am supposed to spend the time at The Department of Head and Neck Surgery at MSKCC and at their partner hospitals and research institutions across the United States.

Program Benefits

The fellowship at an institution like the MSKCC is not only about learning surgical skills. It is more about getting an insight into strategy of dealing with cancer patient. It is about learning ways how to communicate together and how to educate young doctors in order to enhance an already good level of medicine in the Czech Republic. I am convinced that only medical professionals with American experience are the ones who could change the thinking in healthcare management at home.

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center's clinical fellowships and internships offer valuable educational opportunities in an academic medical center dedicated to cancer research, patient care, and education. My attendance to the observership program could establish cooperation between the MSKCC and our ENT clinic. Such cooperation would surely lead to new joint research projects and publications in scientific journals with impact factors and application of new ideas into a healthcare management in the Czech Republic.