Canadian Tour 2012
Academic Exchange Programme

Vancouver and Toronto offer a glimpse of quality urological research work to tour participants

By Dr. A. Erdem Canda, Dr. Roman Sosnowski, Dr. Nyirádi, Prof. Rolf Ackermann

Editorial Note: The following report is a continuation of the previous edition’s article on the Canadian Tour 2012 Academic Exchange Programme. The authors provided here a summary of their impressions during a visit to two major Canadian cities, Toronto and Vancouver, which are the headquarters to the country’s most prestigious urological academic and research centers.

Reports were written by A. Erdem Canda, associate professor of the Department of Urology at Selcuk Ataturk Training and Research Hospital in Turkey, Peter Nyirádi, associate professor and deputy head of the Department of Urology at Semmelweis University Budapest, Hungary; Roman Sosnowski associate professor of the Uro- oncology Department at Oncology Centre in Warsaw, Poland; and Rolf Ackermann, junior chief and professor emeritus of the Urology Department at the Heinrich-Heine-University in Düsseldorf.

Toronto

Toronto, the third stop in our tour, is a rapidly developing city with numerous impressive tower buildings along the beautiful lake of Lake Ontario. A hearty welcome party was arranged by Prof. Laurence Kizl and his wife at their home where we met most of the faculty members (Photo 1).

Academic urological services of the highest standards are provided by the University Health Network (UHN) of the University of Toronto and affiliated hospitals. Besides the facility of Sick Kids we visited the urological facilities of the other affiliated hospitals including St. Michael’s Hospital, Sunnybrook Hospital and Mount Sinai Hospital.

The busy programme organised by our hosts began with a very instructive visit of the hospital for Sick Kids, a world-renowned centre for paediatrics. The complex cases presented at the morning conference and the discussion of the problems by Prof. Pipis Salle, Chairman of the Division of Urology, with the other experts demonstrated impressively the high competence level of this institution. We also toured the clinical facilities and had a glimpse of the new big research building.

Prof. Bagli and his research co-workers introduced their exciting research work which focuses on the role of cell-matrix in various regenerative tissue processes at an epigenetic level.

Next in our Toronto tour was a visit to the facilities of the Department of Urology at the Toronto General Hospital. The department specialises on the surgical management of malignancies of the uro-genital tract. We observed the surgical cases which ranged from simple procedures to the exceptional robot-assisted radical cystectomies to the exceptional management of malignancies of the uro-genital tract.

Clinical care discussions

We were invited to actively participate in clinical case discussions organised by Prof. Zlotta, and presented by the fellows of the department with contributions from the faculty members (Photo 2).

We were also impressed by the young fellows’ achievements in basic research. During our visit at the research lab directed by Prof. Bapa, the fellows in this facility presented their projects which focus on identifying new biomarkers for prostate cancer by epigenetic analysis, prostate cancer immunopathology and the search for biomarkers in male infertility and germ cell maturation of fertility by applying proteomics (Photo 3).

Following their presentations, we gave talks about the EAU’s role, structure, goals, achievements and collaborative projects, and the national urology practices in our own respective countries.

Prof. Herschorn showed us the Department of Urology in Sunnybrook Hospital where we observed the outpatient clinics for patients with reconstructive urological conditions (Photo 4). We discussed some of his complex cases which were managed with great success. The fellows of the research laboratory at the Sunnybrook Health Science Center, headed by Prof. Venkataswaran, introduced us to their current projects, one of which examines the intriguing effect of capsaicin on prostate cancer. Other projects focus on developing new technical tools for prostate cancer diagnosis and therapy.

Competent guide. We also had a great time at the Picasso Exhibition which displays a large collection of Picasso’s masterpieces from the Toronto Museum. As soccer fans, we cheered for our chosen soccer teams and watched their live matches on TV for the European Football Championship.

Vancouver

As a participant in last year’s Canadian group tour in Europe, Dr. Chew did his best to make our stay in Vancouver comfortable right from the start with a warm welcome at the airport. Our programme began with a tour of the department’s clinical facilities. At the OR, department chairman Prof. Goldenberg elegantly demonstrated a case of robotic radical prostatectomy (Photo 5). Meanwhile, Prof. MacNeil, as the department’s programme director and a leading urologist, explained in detail the various educational and training programmes, and impressed us with the wide range of activities the department covers in its daily routine.

Prof. Goldenberg and his wife hosted a wonderful reception at their beautiful home, giving us a very special welcome and the opportunity to meet the faculty members and the former chairman (Photo 6).

Since an essential part of our programme at the Department of Urology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver focuses on their research activities, we were very eager to learn more about the exceptional structure and the programmes that made the Prostate Cancer Center a world-renowned institution, which merited a “Center of Excellence” distinction.

Multidisciplinary programme

In his briefing, Prof. Glesee, Executive Director of the Prostate Cancer Centre (Photo 7) noted that the continued research on cancer problems at the Prostate Cancer Centre remains as one of the centre’s core missions. The strategy is anchored on an extensive multidisciplinary programme consisting of basic, clinical, translational and patient research projects. Activities in these four areas are the essential cornerstones which provide the basis for clinical data, enabling basic investigations that aim for quality research. Current research efforts focus on understanding the molecular changes that cause castrate resistant tumour growth. Dr. Zsombóv’s work, for instance, concentrates on identifying common molecular changes which are responsible for metastasis formation and treatment resistance.

We toured the impressive facilities, meeting the scientific staff with whom we have had insightful discussions about the research work in molecular biology and functional genomics, genetics, pharmacology or immunohistochemistry, to mention a few of the areas they are working on. Having met the staff was also useful in getting an overview of the centre’s conceptual and structural framework, and an understanding of how personal skills and expertise match and fulfil the demand for excellence.

Concluding that part of our visit, we were invited to give presentations about the EAU and the clinical and research activities we’re engaged in our own respective institutions.

Laboratory visit

A visit to a laboratory of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering introduced us to another exciting research field—the research development work on ultrasound elastography concepts and tools for diagnostic and therapeutic application in prostate cancer.

We had a very informative talk with the scientists who gave us a glimpse of their work and the aims which are also within the context we previously have learned at the Prostate Cancer Center. Fusing information of improved technical methodologies with relevant biological information about prostate cancer drew our interest, impressing us with the scope of the work being done by the scientists in Vancouver, and as mentioned by Prof. Goldenberg himself (Photo 8).

Meeting faculty members during the dinner gave us the chance to discuss and exchange ideas about future collaboration. Despite the busy schedules of the programme, we visited old and historical buildings of the University of Toronto with Prof. Zlotta as a competent guide. We also had a great time at the Picasso Exhibition which displays a large collection of Picasso’s masterpieces from the Toronto Museum. As soccer fans, we cheered for our chosen soccer teams and watched their live matches on TV for the European Football Championship.

A visit to the Division of Pediatric Urology (the only tertiary referral centre in the BC region and located at the BC Children’s Hospital), we were welcomed by the division’s head, Dr. Ding, who briefed us on the main tasks of the department. Unfortunately, we didn’t have sufficient time to observe the activities in the other areas such as the management of stone disease and related research headed by Prof. Chew.

With Prof. Chew as our enthusiastic and inspiring guide, we hiked Grouse Mountain (elevation 1,200 meters over 2.9 km) on a rainy Saturday morning, a wonderful and challenging end to our Vancouver tour. A live concert by Bryan Adams at the Rogers’ Stadium also completed this memorable exchange programme, and we expressed our deep gratitude to our hosts when we left Vancouver the following day.