

# IASA NEWSLETTER

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# A YEAR OF FIRSTS

# A Year of Firsts

2012 was a year full of accomplishments for IASA. I would like to thank you again for your growing interest in our organization; our success is in strong measure due to your participation and contributions.

Under the guidance of our Board of Directors we are committed, first and foremost, to our mission of advancing the care of patients afflicted with spine ailments in India. I am pleased to report that much has taken place toward this goal since the first gathering of interested surgeons in Chicago, during the 2011 NASS Annual Meeting.



In our first year, IASA's membership has grown to more than 500 interested spine surgeons of Indian heritage practicing in the US, India, the UK, Canada, and Australia. We have worked aggressively to support the initiatives identified by our Board, and are pleased to share our accomplishments. Here are some highlights:

**Fellowships** We would like to present the experience of Dr. Raaja of Aruppukottai, Tamil Nadu, the first recipient of an IASA Spine Fellowship. He shares his observations and experience in the article that follows on page 4. Dr. Raaja completed his Fellowship in June with Dr. Kern Sing at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. Additionally, we have awarded the first Fellowship for 2013 to Dr. Vijay S. of Vellore, Tamil Nadu. Please read the article for full details and future opportunities.

**Visiting Surgeon Program** Dr. Krishna Kumar of Cochin, Kerala, was the first participant in the IASA Visiting Surgeon Program (VSP). After having been elected an SRS Global Fellow under Dr. Lawrence Lenke in St. Louis, Dr. Kumar applied for and was awarded a VSP in Chicago with Dr. Alpesh Patel at Loyola University and Dr. Kern Singh at Rush Medical Center. Please take a moment to read his experience in the article on page 6. Dr. Feroze Ali of Cuttack, Orissa, was awarded the first 2013 VSP and will be spending a week with Drs. Singh and Patel, in addition to attending the SOSORT 10th International Conference in Chicago.

**Education Program** Perhaps the most significant accomplishment in 2012, was our first educational program in Bangalore attended by over 40 participants. Led by an internationally-known faculty of surgeons from the US, India, and the UK, the program was a combination of didactic presentations, significant hands-on bioskills labs, and a live-surgery session. A similar program will be held again in September 2013 also in Bangalore.

**Humanitarian Missions** IASA proudly supported **Operation Straight Spine's** 7th mission to Kolkata in February 2013. The team consisting of spine surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and technicians from the US and India, was headed by Dr. Jeff McConnell of Allentown, PA. The two-week mission performed approximately 15-20 surgeries on pediatric and adult patients with a variety of spinal conditions.

In closing, I would like to thank those of you who have given your time to our organization and its mission – we are indebted to you for your support. For those who have yet to contribute to or take advantage of our programs, please join us; we will only grow with your guidance!

– Kevin Carouge, IASA Chair

For more detailed information on each initiative, along with procedures, deadlines, and applications visit us on our website: [indo-americanspine.org](http://indo-americanspine.org)

# Our First Educational Program Hosted in Bangalore



In September 2012, IASA held its first educational program at the M S Ramaiah Advanced Learning Center in Bangalore to a sold-out crowd. The Center is a newly established state-of-the-art surgical skills lab and conference center for medical research and training under the direction of Dr. D.C. Sundaresh.

The two-day workshop titled *Emerging Techniques in Complex Spine* was led by an international faculty of spine surgeons from the US, India, and the UK. While originally targeted for 20 participants, demand for the program was strong and at the end we accommodated more than 40 spine surgeons from across India and Mauritius. The course allowed them to hone their skills through a combination of didactic presentations, hands-on cadaveric labs, and live surgery broadcasts.

Some of the topics covered in the didactic component of the course were Cervical Myelopathy and Radiculopathy,

Cervical Disc Replacement, the Importance of Sagittal Balance in Adult Deformity, The Treatment of Adult Spondylolisthesis, Options in Motion Preservation, and Techniques in Minimally Invasive Surgery. A highlight of the program was the hands-on bioskills lab where

attendees had an opportunity, under faculty supervision, to spend ample time at lumbar and cervical stations. We would like to thank Globus Medical for their support in providing the equipment and personnel for this component of the course.

In September 2013, IASA is planning to bring its next educational program back to Bangalore and the well-equipped M S Ramaiah Center. For more information on the program, please

visit our Education tab on our web site: <http://indо-american spine.org/educational>

## Our Faculty

*Dr. Sajan Hegde*  
Co-Chair

*Dr. Dilip Sengupta*  
Co-Chair

*Dr. D.C. Sundaresh*  
Co-Chair

*Dr. Sashin Ahuja*

*Dr. Upendra B.N.*

*Dr. Shekhar Bhojraj*

*Dr. Mahesh Bijjawara*

*Dr. Harsha Hegde*

*Prof. Arvind Jayaswal*

*Dr. Appaji Krishnan*

*Dr. Abhay Nene*

*Dr. Alpesh Patel*

*Dr. Suresh Pillai*

*Dr. Umesh S.*

*Dr. Kern Singh*

*Dr. R. Sivakumar*

*Dr. Gowrishankar Swamy*

*Dr. Ravi Varma*

# First Spine Fellowship is Granted

The Association of Spine Surgeons of India (ASSI) has a biennial Fellowship program that awards one-year fellowships to young spine surgeons. Dr. Palani Vel Raaja of Tamil Nadu, an ASSI Fellow, finished his program with the highest mark and was nominated by ASSI to continue his training in Chicago under IASA's Spine Fellowship.

Dr. Raaja spent a month with Dr. Kern Singh at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. He was able to shadow Dr. Singh at his outpatient clinic, observe surgeries in the OR, attend clinical presentations by Rush residents, and engage in research with other Fellows. On weekends Dr. Raaja explored the city and enjoyed the many festivals along Chicago's River Walk. You can read his report on the right.

IASA will sponsor up to four young spine surgeons from India in 2013. Each Fellow's expenses for visa application, roundtrip air fare, housing, meals, public transportation, and temporary health insurance will be covered by IASA. Please refer to the IASA website to see procedures and deadlines for applications: <http://indo-americanspine.org/fellowships>



## FELLOWSHIP REPORT BY DR. RAAJA

### Journey to America

At the outset, before starting this fellowship report, I would like to thank the Association of Spine Surgeons of India and IASA for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

I started my trip to USA on the 30th of May. From the Chennai International Airport, India through London (Heathrow International Airport), I reached the Chicago O'Hare international Airport on the 31st of May. After all regular immigration activities, I took my first breath in the USA at around 9PM. From the airport, I was picked up by the Limousine Service of Chicago. I was accommodated in a rented apartment at 233, East Wacker Drive, Chicago. My flat was situated on the 8th floor of a 48 floor building. It was a beautiful, large, one-bedroom corner apartment in town, with floor to ceiling windows and with a nice view of Lake Michigan.

### Visit to Rush University

On my first day at Rush University, I met Mrs. Susan Dvojack, Research Administrator and Fellowship Coordinator at Rush Medical. She is a very interesting person and was wonderful in guiding and making things easier for me. She took me to Dr. Kern Singh, my mentor for the fellowship program. He gave an introduction about IASA and the purpose of the fellowship.

My schedule under him was as follows: Mondays: outpatient clinics, Tuesdays and Fridays: operating room, and Wednesdays and Thursdays: research activities. Susan then took me to the volunteer health services of Rush for health screening. MMR vaccination and tuberculosis antibody testing was done. On Monday morning, after finishing the regular formalities like medical clearance and core committee clearance, my Rush identity card was issued.

By 11:00 am, I met Dr. Singh in his clinic. There were a total of 42 appointments that day. I observed how the outpatient department of Rush Orthopedic works. The subspecialties of the orthopedics are color-coded for easy identification. For example, spine specialty is coded as blue and the joint surgery specialty is coded as orange. This was useful for both the patients and doctor to follow them easily.

All X-rays, CT and MRI are digitized and Dr. Singh can view them on his Mac Pro. He has a physician

**From Left:** Dr. Palana Vel Raaja Balasubramanian, Kevin Carouge (Chair), and Dr. Kern Singh

assistant and a resident for help. I happened to see a lot of workmen's compensation cases and related procedures.

All the elective procedures are accommodated within the same week or the following week. Since Dr. Singh is an expert in Minimally Invasive Surgeries, most of his procedures are under day care. So the patients are instructed fully by the physician assistant. They are given the telephone contacts also if they need any clarifications.

Before forwarding the case to the operating room, all the preoperative questionnaires and consent forms are filled out. The forms are then faxed to the assigned operating room. Once all the necessary documents are verified, the case is scheduled for surgery.

### **Operating Room Experience**

Rush University Medical Center operating rooms are situated on the 7th floor of the main building. Dr. Singh usually operates in the operating rooms #29-32. All the operating rooms are highly sophisticated and well-equipped.

I had the opportunity to see all the subset of minimally invasive spine surgeries. All Dr. Singh's low back surgeries are done through tubular retractors. XLIF (extreme lateral underbody fusion) is being done frequently by him and his team. I had an opportunity to see more than 30 cases during my one-month stay. A log book for the cases was meticulously maintained.

### **Academics at Rush University**

There was a clinical presentation every week during which interesting cases were presented by all the residents followed by discussion. I would say that this was the most important event which contributed to the majority of my learning at Rush Medical. There was a separate spine specialty meeting on every Friday morning, and an orthopedic general clinic meeting on every Wednesday.

On June 12, I had an opportunity to attend the thesis day at Rush. The senior residents and all the fellows presented their thesis work. It was wonderful to see all the research work being done at Rush. I also worked on a project on minimally invasive spine surgery in thoracic spine with Miguel Peloton, the research coordinator.

### **Social Life in Chicago**

On weekends, I visited the various museums of Chicago like the Museum of Science and Industry, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago. The River Walk area was a favorite spot for me. I was there on every Saturday evening.

Summer is festival time for Chicago. I attended the Pizza festival and the Chicago Blues festival.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The duration for the IASA fellowship is only four weeks. It will be helpful for the young budding surgeons if the duration is extended. Also it will be more interesting if some exposure to cadaveric labs and biomechanical labs can be included in this excellent program.

All the arrangements made by the Indo-American Spine Alliance including travel, health insurance, accommodation, transportation pass, etc. were excellent. Nazie Dana, the program director at IASA guided me in all the steps of this excellent fellowship. I thank Dr. Singh for accommodating me for the fellowship during his busy schedule and sharing his vast experience in Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery.

– Dr. Palani Vel Raaja ■



# Visiting Surgeon Program is Launched

Dr. Krishna Kumar of Cochin, Kerala, was awarded the Scoliosis Research Society's Global Outreach Fellowship and he spent the month of August 2012 at Washington University in St. Louis, MO. His Fellowship culminated with his attendance of the SRS Annual Meeting in Chicago. Since he had a free week before the conference, he applied for IASA's Visiting Surgeon Program.

IASA was able to accommodate Dr. Kumar's visit to Chicago where he spent a day in OR with Dr. Alpesh Patel at Loyola University Medical Center, and with Dr. Kern Singh at Rush University Medical Center. You can read his report on the right.

IASA offers two opportunities for visiting surgeons in 2013. For details, please visit our VSP page on our web site: <http://indo-americanspine.org/visiting-surgeon-program>

## VISITING SURGEON PROGRAM REPORT BY DR. KUMAR

I was excited to find out about IASA's Visiting Surgeon Program. I had attended the IASA reception during ASSICON 2012



in New Delhi, and was quite impressed with the organization and its proposed programs. I was coming to the US as a Scoliosis Research Society's Global outreach Fellow with Dr. Lenke at Washington University. Since I was

attending the SRS Annual Meeting as well and had a week in between, I applied for a VSP program with IASA and was subsequently accepted.

After completing my Fellowship in St. Louis, I went to visit Dr. Patel in Chicago at Loyola Medical Center. He had scheduled a Direct Lateral Inter-body fusion for an adjacent level degeneration. Dr. Patel explained all the steps of the procedure right from patient positioning to insertion of the cage. It was a meticulous procedure and a learning experience for me. After the case, we had a chat about IASA's vision and its future plans. I invited Dr. Patel to be a member of the faculty at ASSICON 2013 to be held in Cochin, India.

The next leg of my trip was to visit Dr. Kern Singh at Rush Medical Center, where he was running two brand new operating rooms on that day. I witnessed ALIF, MIS bilateral foraminotomies and ACDF. Dr Singh was an amazing surgeon to watch. His overhead HD camera was projected to the wall-mounted TV so that I could watch everything clearly. I had a chat with him and discussed how he became interested in MIS spine surgeries. He also took me to see all his post-operative patients.

I was very pleased with my short visit to Chicago, and hope I can spend more time with the surgeons in the future. I would like to thank IASA, and Drs. Patel and Singh for giving me this rare opportunity to visit and observe.

– Dr. Krishna Kumar ■



# Additional Events & Initiatives

## IASA GATHERINGS AND OUR FIRST EXHIBIT

Each year IASA hosts two gatherings of its members and prospects – one during the North American Spine Society's Annual Meeting (NASS), and another at the Association of Spine Surgeons of India's Annual Conference (ASSICON). This past January we attracted over 120 spine surgeons to our ASSICON 2013 reception in Cochin, Kerala. Two of IASA's Board members, Dr. Rajasekaran and Dr. Hegde, spoke about IASA's initiatives and accomplishments in the past year, as well as various organizational plans for 2013.

In addition, for the first time IASA had a presence in the exhibit area. Nazie Dana, IASA's Program Director, was on hand to talk to interested surgeons about the organization, its mission, programs, and resources. Over 70 surgeons expressed interest and joined IASA. Our next gathering will be at the NASS Annual Meeting in October 2013, in New Orleans.

If you would like to join, please visit us on our web site: <http://indo-americanspine.org/join-us>



## SUPPORTING OUR FIRST HUMANITARIAN MISSION

One of IASA's initiatives is to support Humanitarian Missions. In 2013 IASA is pleased to extend support to **Operation Straight Spine (OSS)**. For the past seven years, OSS has made a two-week mission to Kolkata along with a team of spine surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and technicians headed by Dr. Jeffrey McConnell of Allentown, PA. The team conducts screenings of prospective patients, performs surgeries, carries out post-op visits, and teaches new techniques to local surgeons at the Ramakrishna Mission Hospital.



The surgeons perform approximately 15-20 surgeries on pediatric and adult patients with a variety of conditions such as spinal deformities, traumatic fractures, spinal tumors, scoliosis, spondylolisthesis, spinal stenosis, and tuberculosis of the spine. A similar mission took place in February 2013.

For more information regarding opportunities to participate on mission trips, please visit our web site: <http://indo-americanspine.org/humanitarian>

To learn more about **Operation Straight Spine**, visit their site: [www.healingspines.org](http://www.healingspines.org)

# Stay Involved Online!

Do you have a question regarding one of our programs? The IASA web site is your best source for the latest information on the organization and its initiatives, highlights of past programs, and plans for future gatherings. Each program is clearly outlined under **Opportunities**, with procedures, requirements, applications, and deadlines.

Do you know of a colleague who might be interested in IASA? Ask them to go to our web site and **Join Us**.

Do you have a suggestion or a question? Please **Contact Us**.

Be part of the community. Visit us regularly to keep abreast of IASA:  
<http://indo-americanspine.org>

