

Feedback – Foot and Ankle Senior Clinical Fellowship
Southmead Hospital, North Bristol NHS Trust, Bristol, UK
Period of Training: 07/08/2024 – 08/02/2025 (six months)

I am a consultant orthopaedic surgeon from Malaysia with a special interest in foot and ankle surgery. Prior to my attachment with the North Bristol NHS Foot and Ankle team, I completed a six-month fellowship at the Golden Jubilee University National Hospital in Clydebank. That experience solidified my foundation in foot and ankle surgery, and my subsequent six months at North Bristol truly helped me take the next step in my career as a consultant foot and ankle surgeon.

While my training in Scotland was primarily focused on elective foot and ankle procedures, my time in Bristol provided a much broader scope of experience. In addition to elective cases, I was also exposed to complex trauma and diabetic foot surgery—areas that significantly enriched my understanding and skill set.

Elective surgery at North Bristol has a strong emphasis on arthroscopy, influenced by the legacy of Dr Ian Wilson and further advanced by Mr Steve Hepple's work on the MRI classification of osteochondral lesions of the talus (OLT). The centre also performs a considerable number of total ankle replacements, alongside a diverse range of procedures including forefoot surgeries and deformity corrections. My skills and confidence in arthroscopic ankle surgery improved significantly, as the consultants consistently encouraged and supported me in taking the lead role in many of the procedures.

In the trauma setting, I had the invaluable opportunity to work with the orthoplastics team, assisting in complex fix-and-flap cases for severe open tibial and pilon fractures. I was exposed to both free flap techniques, such as the anterolateral thigh (ALT) fasciocutaneous flap, and more local options like the peroneus brevis flap. Additionally, North Bristol runs a well-structured multidisciplinary team (MDT) clinic for diabetic foot management, integrating podiatry, orthotics, plaster technicians, vascular surgeons, orthopaedics, and endocrinologists. This holistic approach offered me new perspectives and techniques in managing diabetic foot complications, which I intend to implement in my future practice.

During my fellowship, I was primarily attached to Mr Steve Hepple and Mr Pete Robinson, though I also had the chance to work with Mr Stephen Lines (surgical podiatrist), Mr Mark Dahill, and Mr Andrew Riddick. Mr Hepple is an exceptionally skilled and experienced surgeon whose calm, confident, and composed approach in both clinics and theatres was truly inspiring. His mentorship greatly boosted my own confidence in the operating

room. Mr Robinson, too, is a knowledgeable and respectful surgeon with excellent arthroscopic skills, and I was privileged to operate under his guidance.

Meeting and working with Mr Stephen Lines was a unique and eye-opening experience. As the first surgical podiatrist I've encountered, his expertise and technical proficiency were on par with consultant foot and ankle surgeons. Exposure to different approaches for managing the same pathology reinforced the idea that, in foot and ankle surgery, there are many effective techniques—each surgeon ultimately adopts the ones that best suit their hands and yield optimal outcomes for their patients.

My weekly schedule generally consisted of two to three operating theatre sessions, alternating with outpatient clinics, offering a varied and engaging experience. Notably, the consent clinics provided an excellent platform to discuss surgical indications and operative plans in depth. Regular radiology MDT meetings also enhanced collaborative decision-making and helped refine my radiological interpretation skills in the context of complex foot and ankle pathology.

Outside of the hospital, Bristol is ideally located for exploring southern England and Wales. The Roman Baths in Bath are just a short drive away, and London is easily accessible for weekend visits. Bristol itself is a vibrant, historic city with attractions like the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the last Concorde aircraft on display at Aerospace Bristol.

In summary, this fellowship has been an immensely rewarding experience that has propelled my clinical knowledge and surgical skills to new heights. I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to be part of the North Bristol foot and ankle team and would wholeheartedly recommend this fellowship to future candidates seeking comprehensive and well-rounded training in foot and ankle surgery.

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