

COMMUNICATIONS**Report on Attending the Asian Pacific Federation of Societies for Reconstructive Microsurgery 2014**

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I have always thought that conferences were nothing but boring. Even this time, when it was decided that I was assigned to assist with administrative support for Asian Pacific Federation of Societies for Reconstructive Microsurgery (APFSRM) 2014, I did not feel much different. I may be able to make an excuse that it was because I was not able to find anything exciting about it. In any case, I would also dare to say that any medical resident who were asked to help with conference administration would feel the same.

“This conference is different. How you set your mind may help you gain a lot in your life as a doctor.” Even what my mentor, Professor Jeong-Tae Kim, said did not greatly move me. In fact, it was not until two days after the end of the conference when I had had time to contemplate my experience that I finally realized that what he said was true. I realized that I had been greatly inspired and then, beyond that, moved and motivated to act.

My frank opinion on microsurgery has been, “Of course I am interested in it, because I am a plastic surgeon.” However, at APFSRM 2014 my interest in microsurgery grew to new levels. In fact, it is not just interest, but curiosity, and it has turned out to give me a thrill of anticipation that provides me with intrinsic motivation.

The turning point was a lecture by my own mentor, Professor Jeong-Tae Kim of Hanyang University, on “The biophysiologic role of the free flap.” For the first time I realized that the use of simple free flaps is not limited to its primary use—defect coverage, but can be expanded to other roles in surgery. In addition, it was an opportunity for me to reflect on myself. I certainly had been aware that I have

room for more improvement but had made excuses about being busy and having a heavy workload, which suppressed my desire to develop my capabilities. It was almost by chance that I came to this realization during the lecture (Fig. 1).

Of course, I have never before thought that I had an attitude of embarrassment about performing tasks as a second-year resident in plastic surgery. What is more, I have never questioned my own intention to improve my professionalism as a surgeon. I have felt that I have remained determined to push myself forward.

In such a context, I then encountered a wholly new approach to studies on the free flap—which I had already had countless exposure to—and realized that I had been complacent in dealing with certain tasks, the tasks that were given to me.

These internal changes in me reached a peak on the third and the last day of the conference when I met Professor Isao Koshima from Japan and professor Ming-Huei Cheng from Taiwan face to face. It was exciting enough to have a chance to listen in person to the lectures of the two professors whom I had always admired from a distance. As I listened to their lectures, my admiration for them became even greater.

Anyone who works in the field of plastic surgery knows the name “Koshima.” No one would deny that his name will remain important in the history of plastic surgery in the future as well.

I have been hearing about Professor Koshima for a long time. I was deeply grateful that I was able to hear the voice in real life of the person whom I had only met previously through textbooks. Perhaps it was this experience that changed my attitude about the conference. After listening to his lecture, I contemplated the experience for a long time. It occurred to me that, if I took the right steps, my name could also be passed down to future generations of plastic surgeons.

Another vivid memory of my experience assisting with the conference was meeting many professors from abroad face to face.

By participating in a Korean cultural experience program prepared with great care by the conference organizers, I was able to share heart



Fig. 1. With my professors and senior residents in the second meeting of Asian Pacific Federation of Societies for Reconstructive Microsurgery 2014.



Fig. 2.

Group picture of delegates, speakers and participants in the second meeting of Asian Pacific Federation of Societies for Reconstructive Microsurgery 2014.

to heart with our international guests. I was able to empathize with their experiences both at home and abroad although we were in different positions.

Maybe I had been trapped in a box called “hospital” and completely isolated from a series of experiences such as meeting new people, sharing ideas, and just being with them. That is what I experienced at this conference. Although I met these new people through work, we shared a truly happy smile with each other as they guided the way for me and I felt a sense of humanity like I hadn’t for a long while.

I suddenly thought of the times I had spent with people with visual impairment through a volunteer program at the Hanyang University Medical Center. During the time I spent with those with visual disabilities, I was dominated by the idea that I was fulfilling my role as their leader. After all, deep inside me, I had a clear sense of authority over them. They might have felt satisfied in listening to the voice of those talking with them, smiling, and learning about things they could not see. However, I did not realize this while I was doing the volunteer activity. In a sense, they are no different from the foreign professors who came to this conference, who are simply human.

Thus the conference was an opportunity for me to thoroughly reflect on myself as a person and as a doctor. I cannot deny that I had thought that in performing my role as a surgeon, I was “God’s gift to humanity.” I am ashamed to admit that I had been so arrogant.

During the cultural events for our international guests, I observed

the five-story stone pagoda of Jeongnimsa Temple of Buyeo, and suddenly I was deeply moved. When professor Musa Mateev from Kyrgyzstan remarked, “It’s so amazing,” I smiled with empathy. At the same time, I was deeply touched by the fact that a single artwork of a mere stone tower shorter than ten meters high has been visited by all kinds of passersby and lets them share in its inspiration even 1,000 years after its construction.

All 313 conference attendees must have felt the same. As they shared stories for the common good from their own perspectives on a topic, they must have imagined that their present story would earn a smile of agreement by everyone in the future. I was among them, and I believe the 170 scholars who delivered 223 speeches were in agreement.

Before the closing ceremony, I endeavored to remember each and every attendee’s facial expressions. I reflected on these images of them and was able to foresee the future of plastic surgery through their eyes. From the confident tone of Kyung-Moo Yang, president of the federation, delivering his closing remarks in a voice with a deep echo, and from the satisfied smile of my professor, Jeong-Tae Kim, who took charge of planning and implementing the conference program, I saw the overall results of the conference and applauded them with respect from the bottom of my heart. I also gave myself a little credit for making a small contribution to helping with this event (Fig. 2).