

2023 ISPAD “Allan Drash” Clinical Fellowship Report

Recipient: Rade Vukovic, MD - Serbia

Duration: 6 weeks (May 20th – June 30th)

Host center: Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children’s Hospital, NYU Langone
New York, USA

Fellowship supervisor: Prof. Mary Pat Gallagher, MD

Introduction

I work as attending physician at the Department of Paediatric Endocrinology of Mother and Child Health Care Institute of Serbia in Belgrade, and as assistant lecturer at the School of Medicine, University of Belgrade. I am a member of the International Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Diabetes (ISPAD) since 2019 and active ISPAD JENIOUS Group member from 2016-2019. I am also a member of the European Society for Paediatric Endocrinology (ESPE), actively involved as ESPE Communication Committee member and Secretary of the ESPE Working Group on Disorders/Differences of Sex Development.

I was honoured to be the recipient of the 2023 ISPAD Allan Drash Clinical Fellowship and very grateful that I was blessed to undertake this fellowship at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children’s Hospital with Prof. Mary Pat Gallagher as my mentor. The approach to helping children with diabetes at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children’s Hospital is truly multidisciplinary and the whole team functions together as one, providing holistic family-centred care, focusing not only on conventional medical outcomes but also on values, feelings and quality of life of children/families with diabetes.

My goals

My main goals during the Allan Drash Clinical Fellowship at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children’s Hospital were:

1. To improve my knowledge and experience regarding all aspects of care for children with diabetes, with a focus on protocols which can be implemented with the resources available in Serbia.
2. To gain hands-on experience with the newest diabetes technology.
3. To improve my experience regarding optimal nutrition practices and nutrition counselling.
4. To improve knowledge regarding the multidisciplinary collaboration of physicians, diabetes educators, nurses, dietitians, social workers, psychologists and other members of the interprofessional diabetes team.
5. To improve my knowledge regarding the structured diabetes education protocols.

I am very grateful to Prof. Mary Pat Gallagher and the whole team at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children’s Hospital because all my goals have been fulfilled and all my expectations exceeded during the Allan Drash Clinical Fellowship at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children’s Hospital.

Activities

A) DIABETES OUTPATIENT CLINIC

The outpatient clinic for diabetes at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children's Hospital functions perfectly and the whole team is very kind, professional and helpful. It was a wonderful experience to learn from Prof. Gallagher and other endocrinologists, diabetes educators and dietitians, as well as to have insight into contributing work of social workers and psychologists. My biggest impression was amazingly well-organized schedule with lots of time being dedicated to each family. Patients had appointments with at least 2 care team members during each visit, emphasizing the true multidisciplinary teamwork approach needed for helping children with diabetes. I was exposed to continuous glucose monitoring and automated insulin delivery systems, including the Control-IQ, learned about the advantages and limitations of each device and system and how to guide patients to make the appropriate choices regarding their glycaemic control, care involvement and lifestyle. I also improved my knowledge regarding discussing CGM and pump data with children and families and supporting them in implementing changes to improve glycemic control and quality of life. I also expanded my nutrition knowledge, not only applying the great advice to the daily outpatient clinics at my centre, but also to my personal daily eating habits in order to be able to lead by example by living and eating healthy. I also have to express my deepest gratitude not only to diabetes team members, but also to all the families who were very welcoming for me attending their visits and classes.

B) NEW ONSET DIABETES INPATIENTS

Inpatient visits are mostly in the context of children with newly diagnosed type 1 diabetes and as such, are very emotional for families and very important for establishing the grounds for mutual trust and teamwork, including the child and family members in the team, which is essential for successful management of type 1 diabetes. Every time there was a child with new onset diabetes admitted as inpatient, we went to visit them in the ED or the ward and these visits were very important in providing families with much needed information and kind words. It was very useful to have an insight into this important part of family-centred care, serving as a baseline for all the next steps in the education and management of type 1 diabetes.

C) DIABETES EDUCATION CLASSES

During my stay at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children's Hospital I attended many diabetes education classes led by diabetes educators and this was one of the aspects of the Clinical Fellowship which will probably have the most impact on improving the care for children with diabetes, as we are currently restructuring our diabetes education at my home centre. All of the diabetes educators were very knowledgeable, professional and caring, and one of the most impressive points for me was how well the whole diabetes education process is structured and organized, as well as how well are all members of the team unified in their approach and teaching. Also, everyone was so happy to help out and share, and so kind to give me all their educational materials which are already proving to be very useful in the process of restructuring the diabetes education at my home centre. I can't express my gratitude enough, and how much this is already improving the care for children and families with diabetes in my country.

D) HANDS-ON IN DIABETES TECHNOLOGY

I attended many device classes as well as new pump classes and was present during many counselling sessions regarding the daily life, advantages and disadvantages of insulin pumps

and CGM sensors during my stay at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children's Hospital. However, one thing stands out regarding hands-on diabetes technology experience gained, and that was wearing the Control-IQ closed loop system for more than a week, checking my blood sugar levels, bolusing for meals, and doing everything else someone with an insulin pump does every day. This was very useful experience and practical knowledge gained first hand, and I am very grateful to Prof. Mary Pat Gallagher, Vanessa Wissing, RD, CDCES and all of the diabetes educators for making this happen and helping me out with everything along the way.

E) EDUCATIONAL/TEACHING SESSIONS

In the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children's Hospital there were also other opportunities to learn, with weekly journal club sessions or case / research project presentations. I was also very glad to have the opportunity to present several challenging clinical cases from our centre at one of the educational sessions, and the whole team including faculty contributed very much with a great discussion and learning points.

F) OTHER ACTIVITIES

I must remember to mention the visit and very insightful talk with Dr. Becky H. Lois, Director of Psychology at Hassenfeld, regarding the Child Study Center and the role of the psychology team in the care for children/families with diabetes. I also should remember to mention that I was very glad to attend the School event with Christine Lally, RN, CDCES and to experience the involvement the community. There are some other events and educational experiences I will definitely forget to write down in this report, but I will not forget the kind smiles of everyone at the Pediatric Diabetes Center every morning I came in. I will also remember the long talks about patients with Prof. Gallagher, as well as meeting her dear husband, I will remember that Trader Joe's is super-fun (according to Vanessa, Bridget, Abi, Holly and Becca), and I will remember talks about DnD and anime with Simi and the rest of the gang from the Touchdown office. I will also remember the kind-hearted people and endless streets of NYC, and that I should always have an umbrella packed.

I would like to thank ISPAD for providing me with this great opportunity, which was extremely helpful at this point of my career and will significantly improve the care for children/families with diabetes in my centre and in Serbia. A huge thanks to Prof. Gallagher for being the best mentor (and person) ever, it was a privilege to be her student. I am very grateful to the whole team at the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children's Hospital, you guys are the best! I am so lucky that I had my AD Clinical Fellowship at your centre, I couldn't have wished for anything more, and I sincerely recommend the Pediatric Diabetes Center at Hassenfeld Children's Hospital to everyone doing the Allan Drash, it will exceed all your expectations.

Rade Vukovic, MD

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