

2023 ISPAD “Allan Drash” Clinical Fellowship Report

Recipient: Maja Raicevic, MD - Montenegro

Duration: 6 weeks (May 20th – June 28th)

Host center: Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), US

Fellowship supervisor: Dr. Brynn Marks

Introduction

I work at the Institute for Children’s Diseases, Clinical Centre of Montenegro, in Podgorica, Montenegro, as a pediatric endocrinologist. It is the only center in the whole country where type 1 diabetes (T1D) can be managed. We care for approximately 300 children and adolescents with T1D, most of whom managed with multiple daily injection therapy. Our endocrinology department employs a young team of three physicians, educated in Serbia as we do not have a pediatric endocrinology fellowship in Montenegro. Moreover, our team has only one nurse who is a diabetes specialist and we do not have any dietitians. Research activities in our center are minimal.

My objectives

My main goals for the observership at CHOP were:

1. To become familiar with all aspects of the care of children with T1D, and to determine what can be implemented with the resources available in Montenegro.
2. To be exposed to the current diabetes technology.
3. To learn about optimal nutrition practices.
4. To shadow nurses, dietitians, social workers and other members of the interprofessional diabetes team.
5. To learn about the development of clinical research projects.

I am delighted to say that all the objectives have been fulfilled and my expectations were exceeded.

Activities

A) DIABETES OUTPATIENT CLINIC

The outpatient clinic for diabetes in CHOP functions perfectly. It was amazing to shadow physicians, nurses, diabetes educators, dietitians, social workers, psychologists, and to realize the importance of every member of the diabetes team. Each visit is scheduled to last 45 minutes, which is double time we can spend with T1D patient. Patients typically had appointments with at least 2 care team members during each quarterly visit. I was exposed to a multitude of diabetes technologies, including continuous glucose monitoring and automated insulin delivery systems, learned about the advantages and limitations of each device, and how to guide patients to make the appropriate choices regarding their glycaemic control, care involvement, and lifestyle. Also, I learned more about how to discuss CGM and pump data with children and their families and how to support them in implementing changes to improve glycemic control. Each diabetes team meets weekly to discuss their patients and I really find it impressive how hard they work and how they serve all patients’ needs. I expanded my T1D nutrition knowledge following nutritionists specialized in T1D, celiac disease and sports, which was a great experience.

B) DIABETES INPATIENT PROGRAM

During the last week of my fellowship program, I attended inpatient rounds in the pediatric endocrinology and diabetes ward. It was also very interesting to attend new onset T1D

education and to see patients being discharged in 1-2 days, whereas they stay approximately 10 days in our hospital. This is a very important point which could be changed in Montenegro and has the potential to lead to significant cost savings without compromising the quality of care. As we are very restrictive regarding nutrition in new onset T1D patients it was so mind changing to see how patients in CHOP are being encouraged to count carbohydrates and continue their life following the same path they were on before diabetes.

C) ENDOCRINE OUTPATIENT CLINICS

I'm very grateful that Dr. Brynn Marks discussed with me the unresolved cases I have, and what could be improved in our endocrine clinic. She gave me the opportunity to attend various endocrine clinics: Hyperinsulinism clinic (Dr. Diva DeLeon) , Thyroid clinic (Dr. Andy Bauer) and Growth clinic (Dr. Ada Grimberg), and make some very important contacts.

D) EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS

In CHOP you always can learn, especially as they organize once or twice weekly case presentations, research project presentations and journal club sessions. They also shared with me ADA 2024 Conference highlights, which was great to read.

E) RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

As Dr. Brynn Marks is a very active researcher in diabetes field, it was an honour to discuss with her how to plan and implement research when you have limited resources. Moreover, I have to admit that she has opened new horizons for me, explaining how to use everyday practice in our hospital to get valuable research data. We have planned to prepare the research together and to analyze the data regarding T1D patients' control during diabetes camp.

F) DIABETES CAMP

I was lucky to have the opportunity to attend a diabetes camp, led by CHOP medical staff with the support of the American Diabetes Association, Camp Freedom. It was such an inspiring and wonderful experience, which raised additional objective for me: to organize the first diabetes camp for children in Montenegro. Spending 24 hours, during 7 days, with children with T1D, for the first time made me deeply aware of their challenges along with the challenges facing their parents/caregivers. The empowering moment that will stay engraved in my memory is seeing a bunch of children proudly wearing different diabetes technology devices and enjoying their activities around the swimming pool.

G) OTHER ACTIVITIES

Beautiful memories are made in hospital, but also after work. Dr. Brynn Marks warmly welcomed me and even organized a weekend trip to Washington DC for me. We visited breathtaking monuments, and she introduced me to her friends living in the town. I have also visited her hometown, Media, few times.

A CHOP nurse practitioner Pantea Minnock and her lovely family invited me to a barbecue, we had a wonderful time, enjoyed talk, food, games and Amazon shopping.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank ISPAD and JDRF for giving me this great opportunity, which was extremely helpful at this point of my career and will significantly improve pediatric diabetes care in Montenegro. A special Thanks to Dr. Brynn Marks for being an amazing mentor, so kind and supportive. It was a privilege to be your fellow! Thanks to Pantea Minnock, she made me feel like home, and truly enjoy my time in the US outside the hospital. I am very grateful

to Meredith Allen, one of the CHOP diabetes educators, for being so kind- she helped me to prepare for camp and shared educational material with me.
I am deeply grateful to the whole team at CHOP, for their hospitality and kindness, they warmly welcomed me and helped me in various aspects of my observership.

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