

Neels Hedwig

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Host site Prof. H. P. Dietz, Sydney University Nepean Medical School

REPORT:

First of all I want to sincerely thank IUGA for the observership award meant for allied health care practitioners. I am a Belgian physiotherapist, specialized in Women's Health, pelvic floor rehabilitation and perinatal physiotherapy and finished my PhD in this domain in 2018. Afterwards I received the opportunity to perform clinical work in a multidisciplinary pelvic floor unit and to combine that with scientific research and teaching projects at the University of Antwerp.

I only became an IUGA member in 2016, but since then, I have enjoyed the opportunities to present and discuss our studies at international meetings. I need to confess that I was rather surprised about several unexpected actions of support by IUGA to junior researchers/physiotherapists. But it has really been such an empowering experience to notice the sincere support to become more involved, by many friendly board members, support team members, mentors and colleagues.

The idea of applying for an IUGA observership award raised after the annual meeting in Vienna, where we briefly discussed the occurrence of vaginal flatulence. A recent literature review of our team revealed that evidence about "vaginal flatulence" or "vaginal wind" is sparse. Although some authors found that it might have an important negative impact on the quality of life and is bothering many women. Additionally we noticed that the complaint of "vaginal farting" is not only increasing in our clinical practice but is also a frequently discussed topic on social media.

We argued that in order to study the prevention and treatment options for this bothering problem, we should first discover the underlying pathophysiologic mechanisms. Prof. H. P. Dietz and prof. Shek Ka Lai were willing to offer me the opportunity to contribute in one of their ongoing studies, focusing on vaginal flatulence, using transperineal ultrasound. So initially, the aims of this observership were focused on research. We intended to combine sonographic imaging results, with clinical data retrieved by a pelvic floor assessment, a POP-Q analysis and questions about vaginal flatus.

But as one can read between the lines, the outcomes and benefits of my observership became so much broader than initially intended. From the first minute until the last second of my five weeks visit I was immersed in the functional anatomy of the pelvic floor and transperineal ultrasound. Prof. H. P. Dietz is an extremely devoted mentor. I have been so lucky and grateful to learn from him and his team (Prof. C. Shek, dr. Moshe Gillor, dr. Jessica Caudwell-Hall and dr. Stefaan Pacqué). They were all so dedicated to educate me. They have never spared me any chance to learn, to grow and to improve. I was able to attend urodynamic assessments, to attend surgery, to perform many ultrasound scans, to contribute in research, to follow interesting workshops and to discuss all of my thoughts and questions during our review sessions.

Travelling to the other side of the world, leaving all your personal and professional certainties behind, forces you to reflect on who you really are and how much you still have to learn. Additionally diving into a complete new challenge: trying to become competent in transperineal ultrasound assessments and carrying on research, sometimes seemed an impossible goal to reach. But because of prof. Dietz' enthusiasm and experienced approach, it turned out in an invaluable experience. Sometimes they let me swim in open water, sometimes they took me by the hand, but always found the best way to enhance my learning curve. Without any doubt, my knowledge, skills and research competences have strongly improved. Although I still have to learn a lot more. And while I was only one of their many visiting scholars, striving to reach my goals; nevertheless they really empowered

me to proceed in my enthusiasm and dedication. They gave me the chance to work hard and appraised my personal and professional journey. In conclusion, that approach of high demanding and ambitious but warm and sincere support, turns prof. H. P. Dietz and his team into excellent mentors. Which I explicitly wanted to thank gratefully by publishing this in an IUGA newsletter.

In the near future we will certainly inform IUGA about our research outcomes. And clearly, I hope to proceed in this direction. Transperineal ultrasound of the pelvic floor is such a beautiful and promising assessment option. It would be so interesting to contribute in further research and implementation, aiming to improve risk stratification, prevention and personalized management of symptoms. As a physiotherapist I am (as many others) passionate to raise more awareness about pelvic floor dysfunction and trauma. And I will always remember Prof. Dietz' words: "Always try to be an ally, certainly not a concurrent..." For me, this observership was a very fruitful example of how inspiring working in a multidisciplinary setting can be and delivers such an added value to women's health care.

Finally, I also want to thank my supervisors in Belgium in the Antwerp University hospital, Prof. A. Vermandel, prof. S. De Wachter and prof. Y. Jacquemyn for allowing me to take time off and to support me to enroll our new ambitions.

In conclusion, the IUGA Observership turned out to be a lifechanging experience. I hope that this report reflects my endless gratitude to my mentors and to IUGA. I could advise any IUGA member to do the same. Dive into uncertainty and enjoy climbing back up.

Thankyou a million times!





The Team: Prof. Dietz, Dr. Stefaan Pacquée, Dr. Moshe Gillor, Hedwig Neels, Dr. Jessica Caudwell-Hall



In theatre: Dr. Jessica Caudwell-Hall, Dr. Stefaan Pacquée, Dr. Moshe Gillor



Workshop: Prof. Clara Shek, Hedwig Neels, Angela James, and others



Review Session - Prof. Dietz at the ultrasound