

Puja Kachroo, MD was the 2013 resident recipient of the Scanlan/WTS Traveling Mentorship Award. Dr. Kachroo spent two weeks in Pittsburgh with WTS Member Mentor, Dr. Manisha Shende in May 2013. Here is how Dr. Kachroo summarized her experience:

This past May, I was the fortunate recipient of the Scanlan/Women in Thoracic Surgery Traveling Mentorship Award. A significant part of this fellowship involved spending two weeks with the cardiothoracic surgery team at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC). It was here that I was paired with Dr. Manisha Shende, an assistant professor of surgery in the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery and the director of Thoracic Services at Magee-Womens Hospital. I was also afforded the opportunity to spend time with Dr. James Luketich, chief of the division of thoracic and foregut surgery at UPMC.

I had the opportunity to observe some of his department's most unique aspects of CT surgery, including resection of large substernal goiters compressing major vascular structures, lung transplants, complex coronary/valve operations, LVADs, esophagectomies, repair of giant paraesophageal hernias, as well as one of the first implantable diaphragm stimulators for ALS patients. I left UPMC in awe of my experiences, hoping that I would be able to pursue a career in thoracic surgery, but aware that it is a small and select few that are afforded such an opportunity.

In Dr. Shende, I expected a mentor and role model. While spending our days in clinic, the operating room, educational conferences and journal clubs, I came to learn much more about Dr. Shende beyond her academic pursuits, clinical prowess and surgical skills. We met for lunch on the weekend at her (impeccable and chicly furnished) house and bonded over the unique nature of being female surgeons, and furthermore, women in the field of thoracic surgery. I was thrilled by the end of my visit to have gained both a mentor and friend – someone to help me on my "path less traveled" and commiserate in my successes and failures.

My experiences at UPMC made match day even more special when I learned that I would be continuing my surgical endeavors at the Washington University in St. Louis as one of their thoracic surgery fellows next year. Having such a unique experience has made me realize the importance of mentorship. I hope, in the future, to be able to pay it forward by mentoring the next generation of burgeoning female Thoracic surgeons.