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**SAINT LOUIS
UNIVERSITY**

**Health Sciences Center
School of Medicine**

**Department of Surgery
Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery**

September 30, 2015

Thoracic Surgery Foundation for Research and Education
Carolyn Reed Traveling Fellowship Committee
633 N. St. Clair Street, 23rd Floor
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Committee Members:

I am extremely pleased that I pursued the opportunity by the Thoracic Surgery Foundation for Research and Education Carolyn Reed Traveling Fellowship to accelerate the learning process for robotic thoracic surgery and add that missing element to the minimally invasive thoracic surgery program at Saint Louis University as my prior training and practice had focused exclusively on thoracoscopic surgery. I am a firm believer in the superiority of any minimally invasive approach and feel that robotic thoracic surgery is an important complement to the thoracoscopic techniques that I currently use. I also know from prior experience that the learning curve for any new technology can be steep and prolonged but intense focused training can be invaluable in moving a surgeon farther along in a safe and controlled manner.

With this in mind, I selected the program at the University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB), led by Dr. Robert Cerfolio where I spent three weeks in August of this year. Before going to UAB I completed a basic robotic surgical training curriculum outlined by Intuitive that included a cadaver lab in Atlanta. I spent additional time on the simulator and performed five proctored cases at my own institution. I also obtained an Alabama license and UAB hospital credentials so that I could participate in actual cases. With this advance training and preparation I was able to comfortably sit at the teaching console on the first day and focus more on the technical nuances of the operation throughout my time at UAB, having already mastered the mechanics of the robotic system. The experience was especially valuable since Dr. Cerfolio has a consistent and reproducible technique in which each step of the case is broken down into well-defined subtasks with very little variation. This included the entire surgical team and extended from the double lumen tube positioning and securing, to patient positioning, preparation, incisions, docking and the actual operation from beginning to end.

By the conclusion of the fellowship, I had been able to perform each of the key steps of a robotic lobectomy and achieved much greater comfort with the conduct of the operation than would have been possible through traditional means by which practicing surgeons are able to learn new techniques. I have been able to bring these techniques back to Saint Louis University and have already scheduled my first robotic lobectomy. The majority of the funds from the Fellowship were used to provide direct funding of the robotic training at the University of Alabama. The TSFRE Carolyn Reed Traveling Fellowship has been a tremendous opportunity and has greatly enhanced my surgical skills and career.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ME', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Melanie A. Edwards, M.D.
Assistant Professor of Surgery