

I was notified by email of my successful selection as the recipient of the maiden edition of this award and the first thing that came to mind was the lyrics of one of my all-time favorite classic: "sometime in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good" I was over the moon. I felt privileged and honored. I want to officially thank Women in Thoracic Surgery and the Korean Women Association for giving me this opportunity



I arrived Boston for the centennial edition of the AATS annual meeting on the 30th of April. This was my first time in the US, and I was warmly received by Jessica Donington (the chair, of WTS) who saw to it that I settled in nicely after the minor glitches I had on arrival at Boston Airport.

I attended and fully participated in the AATS conference thereafter, where we were introduced as the maiden award winners. WTS arranged a cocktail event, where we were formally introduced. I met representatives of the Korean women association, the second award recipient, other female Cardio-thoracic surgeons, and highlight of the evening for me was meeting my mentors for the fellowship: Lauren Kane and Mara Antonoff

Lauren Kane, Texas children's hospital

I started my travel fellowship with congenital cardiac surgery, being mentored by Lauren Kane. It was truly an amazing experience. It felt like I had known Lauren my whole life! Her OR sessions, clinic sessions were effortlessly educative. I had the opportunity to meet the chief of surgery: Professor Fraser a renowned congenital cardiac surgeon, Lauren's male colleagues like Dr. Ike Adachi, Dr. Carlos Merry and Dr. Jeffery Hienle. They gave me free access to their ORs and answered any questions and provided clarifications when I needed them. I have always loved congenital surgery but was almost giving up on it, my time with Lauren reawakened my dream of being a congenital cardiac surgeon!

High lights of my time with Lauren include:

➤ Priceless OR time:

I saw repeatedly a variety of congenital cardiac procedures. I could at some point walk through the steps in my mind. Lauren made sure I followed each operation, noting technical points and 'ways out'

➤ Surgical research:

The bed rock of all that goes on at Texas children's is research. Research has never been my strongest points, but I looked forward to the research meetings. I am happy to say that since my return, I have authored 2 research papers and I am currently working on my 3rd! I have also started writing articles for a series I titled 'The African Chest', which aims to put out peculiar cases seen by a cardio-thoracic surgeon in south west Nigeria which are probably not so common elsewhere. I hope to send Lauren the first two articles ASAP.

➤ Fraser's round:

An academic seminar where cases were discussed and residents taught. I found this very useful, congenital echo became a lot less 'intimidating'. A practice I took away and have since implemented in my own unit, is presentation of the morbidity and mortality cases by the managing consultant as

opposed to residents who may not even have been involved in the patient care. It was so much more educative and the residents in my unit have commended the change of approach.

I would like to say a very big thank you to my friend, **Lauren Kane** for making my stay worthwhile. We are gearing up to begin our pediatric cardiac program in my center and I feel better equipped sitting in those meetings now!

Mara Antonoff, MD Anderson Cancer Center

I rotated through MD Anderson under the mentorship of Mara Antonoff for ten days. Those ten days have made a huge impact on my thoracic practice in Nigeria. I had a lot of thoracic training and exposure during my fellowship days, one aspect of thoracic surgery I felt was lacking was thoracic oncology. There is no taking away from the fact that most cases we see in Nigeria present very late as we do not have screening programs in place, and there is a strong link between disease entities and religion/culture) in our environment (#theafricanchest). However, my first few days with Mara, clearly showed me that we 'gave up too easily' on our thoracic oncology patients and I knew I had to 'fix' that or at least try.

The highlights of my stay included

- Tumor Board Conferences: I attended the esophageal and lung cancer conferences where cases were discussed and best modality of treatment selected for each patient. It was the most educative of meetings I had sat through in a while. Upon return to my center, we now have weekly thoracic oncology conference which has helped improve our practice.
- Thoracic Oncology Clinic: My experience in MD Anderson has made me pay more attention to thoracic oncology patients, so much that we have instituted separate a day for outpatient thoracic oncology clinic. We are now undertaking more surgical resections in carefully selected patients. I hope sometime in the near future to spend more time at MD Anderson so as to be better equipped to build our thoracic oncology practice. In Nigeria, we do not have the luxury to choose to be a cardiac or thoracic surgeon, we have to be both.
- O.R times: I didn't have a lot of time with Mara but I learnt a lot, which I applied to my practice immediately. Of note is what is now known in my center as **MARA'S incision!** This is essentially muscle sparing thoracotomy. Prior to my visit to MD Anderson we made huge incisions, split the muscle (surgeon needs space!) needless to say we had huge scars. I saw Mara work through a 4cm or less posterior muscle sparing thoracotomy and she got a whole lot done and had lots of space too. I watched her closely and that's all I do now in my center. A common question my O.R nurses ask me when I walk into the O.R these days is: "What are we doing today, the old thoracotomy or MARA'S incision?" My patients are happier with the result. I also picked up a couple of other little techniques to help reduce post-operative pain in thoracic patients.

Fun Times

It wasn't all just a working fellowship, I had some fun too. I had a guided tour of Harvard and MIT while in Boston. Thank you, Lauren, for the dinners and hanging out. Who knew barbecue and fireworks was this much fun? I was downtown in Houston on the 4th of July and I had a blast. I was home in Nigeria before Hurricane Harvey. My heart goes out to all families that lost valuables, properties, homes and even loved ones! Houston was home for most of two months and I hope all the survivors pull through stronger.

Once again, I want to say thank you to WTS, the Korean Women in Thoracic Surgery, and the Sungjoo Foundation for this invaluable opportunity.

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