



2017 ASRM Women's Microsurgery Group ViOptix Travel Scholarship Winner Chao Long

I had the distinct privilege of attending the 2017 ASRM conference as the Women's Microsurgery Group (WGM) ViOptix Travel Scholarship winner. Now back at Stanford, I've had the opportunity to reflect on this extraordinary experience – please allow me to share below.

Although I had observed microsurgery cases as a third-year medical student, it wasn't until I needed to create small defects in rat Achilles tendon-calcaneus constructs for my tissue engineering laboratory experiments that I found myself "operating" behind a microscope. I was enamored by the precision and control that the microscope afforded, however this was accompanied by a realization of how daunting of an undertaking it is to train to become a microsurgeon. This realization was invigorating—what a great privilege would it be, I thought, if I were given the opportunity to master these skills? What an even greater privilege and rewarding pursuit would it be, I thought, if I were then able to apply these skills towards restoring form, function, and dignity for my future patients? It is with this wide-eyed, bushy-tailed attitude that I geared up for the ASRM conference, eager to soak up as much teaching and shared wisdom as possible.

The conference certainly didn't disappoint in this regard. Starting with Dr. Weber's Keynote Lecture, I learned how best outcomes in complex head and neck cancer surgery can only be achieved with a multidisciplinary approach. In the various scientific paper presentations, I learned the countless ways in which the field is innovating and continuing to advance patient care. In the breakout sessions, I learned about best practices and latest techniques. In the "Disaster of the Masters" Panel, I learned how things can go wrong, and more

importantly how to troubleshoot and problem solve when they do.

Although these heroic acts in the OR were awe-inspiring, what struck me even more was that for the ASRM community, the patient comes first—*always*. I sensed an unspoken pact that had been made: we will never compromise patient care. For example, during "On the Hot Seat: How Would You Handle this Complication?", it was clear that in these difficult cases, it is not ego that matters, but rather finding the best solution for the patient regardless of who thinks of it. Or, during "Disasters of the Masters," the panelists' honesty in sharing their complications and the frank discussion that followed demonstrated a collaborative spirit with the ultimate goal of improving patient care everywhere.

Finally, I felt the warmth immediately, and I'm not talking about Hawaii's beautiful weather. From the WGM's session on conflict resolution to the Young Microsurgeon's Group's panel on whether to pursue a microsurgery fellowship, I sensed the warmth of mentorship and friendship, as I was welcomed into the fold. I saw that this is a community that supports each other.

This scholarship, of course, is a prime example of the ASRM's dedication to community and mentorship. Despite the recurrent narratives of increasing physician burnout and medicine's bleak outlook, I've learned that the promise of a supportive community dedicated first and foremost to healing their patients is alive and well, and for that, I extend my deepest gratitude.

Sincerely,
Chao Long
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