

EUSTAR Fellowship Report

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The EUSTAR Fellowship program provided me with a unique opportunity to enhance my clinical and academic expertise in the field of systemic sclerosis (SSc). Over a period of three months, I was hosted by the Scleroderma Unit at the Royal Free Hospital in London, under the supervision of Professor Christopher Denton, Dr. Voon Ong, and their multidisciplinary team. This report summarizes my objectives, experiences, key learnings, and the impact of this fellowship on my career development and aspirations in systemic sclerosis care and research.

The primary objectives for this fellowship included:

- Strengthening my clinical knowledge and decision-making in systemic sclerosis, particularly in complex and refractory cases;
- Gaining insight into the latest treatment strategies and emerging therapies;
- Observing a multidisciplinary model of care tailored specifically to systemic sclerosis patients;
- Establishing professional connections and exploring opportunities for future collaborations.

These goals were fully achieved and, in many ways, exceeded my expectations. Through clinical exposure, active participation in patient consultations, case-based discussions, and involvement in departmental meetings, I was involved in a dynamic and stimulating learning environment.

Throughout my three-month fellowship at the Royal Free Hospital's Scleroderma Unit, I was actively engaged in a broad range of clinical activities that enhanced my understanding of systemic sclerosis (SSc) and its multidisciplinary management.

A core component of my weekly schedule was participation in outpatient clinics, which were held twice a week. During these clinics, I had the opportunity to evaluate and follow up with patients diagnosed with both systemic sclerosis and localized scleroderma. I was involved in detailed history taking, physical examinations—including skin scoring—and reviewing laboratory and imaging results. Each case was thoroughly discussed with experienced consultants, providing valuable opportunities to deepen my diagnostic reasoning and therapeutic decision-making skills. These one-on-one case discussions with experts were among the most enriching aspects of the fellowship, as they allowed me to gain personalized feedback and understand the nuances of complex case management.

In addition to regular clinics, I attended the joint dermatology–rheumatology clinic, which takes place once a month. This collaborative clinic was especially insightful for understanding the cutaneous manifestations of scleroderma and distinguishing between localized forms and systemic disease. The combined expertise of dermatologists and rheumatologists offered a holistic view of disease presentation and treatment strategies.

Once a month, I joined the interstitial lung disease (ILD) multidisciplinary team meeting, which brought together rheumatologists, pulmonologists, and radiologists to discuss challenging ILD cases. These meetings were essential for learning how to approach diagnosis, severity assessment, and therapeutic

decisions in SSc-ILD. The collaborative and evidence-based approach to these discussions underscored the importance of interdisciplinary care in optimizing patients' outcomes.

Another important component of my fellowship was exposure to current and emerging treatment options. I gained experience with advanced immunosuppressive therapies. I also learned about ongoing clinical trials and investigational therapies, and observed how patients were selected and monitored. The structured use of treatment algorithms, based on disease subsets and organ involvement, provided a valuable framework for making therapeutic decisions.

The fellowship significantly contributed to my professional growth. I improved my clinical judgment, gained confidence in managing complex systemic sclerosis patients, and developed a better understanding of the disease's multisystemic nature.

Equally important were the connections I made with experts and peers in the field. The warm atmosphere of the department made it easy to integrate into the team. I received continuous support and mentorship from clinicians, nurses, and allied health professionals, all of whom were generous in sharing their knowledge and experience.

These relationships have laid the groundwork for future collaborations, particularly in the areas of clinical research and the development of standardized care protocols. I am hopeful that continued dialogue with the Royal Free team will benefit not only my career but also systemic sclerosis care in my home institution and country.

The Royal Free Hospital provides an ideal environment for advanced learning. I was welcomed as a full member of the team and was encouraged to participate in clinical and academic activities. The supervision was outstanding—marked by accessibility, thorough case reviews, and a genuine commitment to teaching.

The interdisciplinary approach and patient-centred care model were all exemplary. Being part of such a cohesive and experienced unit enriched my learning and inspired me to advocate for similar structures at home.

The Fellowship at the Royal Free Hospital has been a great experience. It allowed me to grow as a clinician, broaden my understanding of systemic sclerosis, and forge meaningful professional connections. I return to my home institution equipped with new skills, ideas, and a renewed commitment to improving patient care. I am grateful to the Royal Free Scleroderma Unit and EUSTAR for this opportunity.