

Summary of Experience at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

I am writing to share my experiences so far of my fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC). First of all I would like to thank for the support I have received for my travel to MSKCC. I will stay here for two year with my husband and our soon-to-be six years old son, what the support we have to help us travel has help us very much. Thank you!

Fellowship at MSKCC

Dating back to 1884, MSKCC is one of the leading cancer research hospitals worldwide, and was recently ranked as the second-best cancer institution in the US. MSKCC offers several fellowships, a structured sub specialization which is done after graduating from residency.

The fellowship in gynecologic oncology at MSKCC is four years, with the two first years dedicated to research and chemotherapy. On the third years, an international fellow (this year me) joins the established group of three American fellows, for two years of surgical training.

As a fellow, I participate in various clinical responsibilities, with focus on surgical treatment of gynecologic cancer, including pre- and post-operative care.

Day begins early—typically around 6:30 AM— with rounding, followed by pre-operative preparations of the same days` patient.

First patients enter the OR between 07.30 and 09.00, and the number of procedures is decided by the responsible attending that day. I operate togheter with the attending during surgeries, which is a constant learning process. I'm expected to become independent in most oncological procedures, including debulking procedures and robotic procedures during my stay. MSK has 29 ORs, and a total of 11 robotic platforms. All the robotic platforms have dual consul, and the fellow is always in the consul side-by-side with the attending, with a physician assistant and often a resident bedside. I am responsible for the postoperative care of patients I have operated until they are discharged, and see them every day, helped by residents and physicians assistants.

Fellows in their surgical years rotate every month between teams, consisting of 2-3 attendings. Fellow usually operate four days a week. Most attendings perform a wide variety of gynecologic cancer procedures, but there are some who have more debulking surgeries, while others have more robotic cases. I would estimate that the volume operated during one day is the double of what I am used to from my home institution. The high volume each day together with about four OR days daily, makes the exposure and time in the OR exceptional high for fellows.

As side from the surgical duties, MSKCC is heavily involved in research, and fellows are expected to be up to date with relevant research, including medical oncology treatment (chemotherapy, immunotherapy etc).

On Mondays there are Great Rounds, this summer the topic has been research, where different presenters go through methodology in research and other research related topics for fellows and residents. Every Thursday there are Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)

meetings, where first-year fellows present cases supported by descriptions from radiologists and pathologists, before the cases are discussed with regards to recommended treatment. Fellows must be prepared to answer questions related to the evidence of preferred treatment, and often to describe them in detail. No laptops are allowed, in order to keep focus.

There are also regularly disease-specific research meetings in the department. The number of papers published from the department is high, as is the number of abstracts submitted to national and international congresses. All abstracts have to be approved by the department, and go through a statistical control before submitted, to ensure the quality.

Living in NYC

Housing is provided by MSKCC through subsidized apartments, located just across the street from the hospital. Our residence offers amenities such as a private yard with a barbeque area, a playground for children (with basketball court and water fountains to play in on hot summer days), and common laundry facilities. The building also features a shared gym and a communal room on the 38th floor with breathtaking views over Manhattan, perfect for social gatherings. Despite being situated near the heavily trafficked highway along East River, the apartment is surprisingly quiet.

Work-Life Balance

In terms of work-life balance, there are several differences from the US system compared to what we are used to in the Nordics. New York State allows up to 80 hours work per week, with at least 8 hours of rest between shifts. We operate until we are done with the cases of that same day, so far I have never heard of cancellations because cases were late (yesterday we started a debulking at 5 pm). There has been some late nights, but the minimum 8 hours rest rule between working session is very much respected, where fellows cover for each other in order to get the required rest if necessary.

Family life

My husband is currently on leave from his job as a pilot, which allows him to help as we settle in, he plan to do some remote studying, and apply for a part time job. Our son is already enthusiastic about learning English; few words every day. We believe he will be fluent by Christmas. With a maximum of 80 working hours a week, the work-life balance is different from what I am used to.

There are also huge differences in social rights and expectations, such as parental leave practices. American colleagues often work full time until close to their delivery date and return relatively quickly after childbirth (here usually 2-3 months). Costs of childcare are significant, but it is possible to get day care or nanny for a baby as young as a few months. Luckily for us, public schools are free, and our son will attend the public school in the area, where they provide teachers for children who don't speak English.

Workdays vary depending on the number and length of procedures, but even when some days are very long, the work I perform is rewarding, and the effort is absolutely

worth it. Most weekends are off, giving time to relax and rest, and enjoy what the city has to offer.

American Cultural Experience

The local community has been warm and inviting, showing genuine interest in our backgrounds and offering support with practical challenges. Surprisingly many have visited Nordic countries, and they are genuinely interested in our background and culture. There is never an elevator ride without small talk.

The introduction to American culture began on the 4th of July, with a celebration hosted by one of the attending physicians. The event was a family event, with baseball games and water balloons for the kids, and fireworks over the Hudson River after sunset.

We have also taken trips to nearby beaches during the hot summer days, and we visit Central Park as our extended garden with running paths and playgrounds. As a city citizen we have access to free or very reduced entrance fees at many of the major museums, including the city's several zoos, which are very much appreciated by our son. The culinary experience so far is a combination of the huge variety of restaurants just blocks away

Moving to New York is a new chapter in my and my family's lives. We already enjoy living here, and try to take advantages of what the city has to offer. I am sure this trip will change us. So far, working at MSKCC has been truly rewarding, both professionally and personally. I already know that the knowledge and experience acquire will benefit Norwegian patients, once we return to Oslo in two years. I would like to thank for the Nordic Federation of Societies of Obstetrics and Gynecology for the support I have received for my travel!