

International fellows come to learn the ‘PMCC Way’

Hundreds of national and international physicians apply each year to train with Peter Munk Cardiac Centre specialists in a unique program

by Shelley White

Dr. Diego Delgado and Dr. Carolina Alba, cardiologists from Argentina, were two of the fellows from around the globe hoping to bring PMCC teaching back to their home institutions.



At the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre (PMCC), the world’s best and brightest come together for a common cause: to save lives.

Walking through the halls of the PMCC, it’s not uncommon to encounter groups of international fellows intently discussing a complex case with staff physicians. These fellows hail from all over the globe – Asia, South America, the U.S., Europe, Africa – bringing knowledge with them and then taking what they’ve learned back to their home countries.

Each year, hundreds of national and international physicians apply to obtain postcertification training with experienced specialists at the PMCC in areas such as: adult congenital heart disease, cardiovascular surgery, vascular surgery and heart failure and transplantation. While they learn, the fellows provide much-needed manpower to help PMCC staff with the day-to-day work of treating patients.

The PMCC’s fellowship program attracts international physicians because of its excellent worldwide reputation, says Dr. Barry Rubin, Medical Director of the PMCC.

“We are a growing, expanding, international brand,” he says.

“We have a clear mission to be the No. 1 heart centre in the world.” Fellows also want to study with the PMCC’s many “superstars” in the field, he adds, such as cardiac surgeon Dr. Tirone David, cardiologist Dr. Heather Ross and vascular surgeon Dr. Thomas Lindsay.

While at the PMCC, fellows learn the “PMCC Way,” says Dr. Rubin. It’s a philosophy that is the cornerstone of the institution and includes three pillars: a mandate to work in multidisciplinary teams, a commitment to using the best equipment in the world and an unremitting focus on innovation.

“Lots of people talk about this, but we actually walk the walk,” he says.

Dr. Rubin says that one of the goals of the international fellowship program is to teach fellows the PMCC Way in the hopes that they will bring it back to their home institution in Tokyo or Buenos Aires or Bangalore.

“The real mark of success is: ‘Did that person ascend to a leadership position and then start training other people locally, the way they were trained at the PMCC?’” says Dr. Rubin. “That’s when you know you’ve really had an impact.”

Meet four physicians who have had that impact since their time as international fellows at the PMCC:

Dr. Diego Delgado
Cardiologist, Reuben and Florence Fenwick Family Professorship in the Medical Management of Heart Failure

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Argentina

Dr. Diego Delgado was a cardiologist in his native Argentina when he decided to further his training internationally. He says he was drawn to the PMCC because the transplant program was new, and he was looking for a challenge.

“I was already trained in advanced heart failure and transplant mechanical devices, so for me it was going to be more of a challenge to help build a program from scratch, versus going somewhere that was already established,” he says.

After his fellowship, Dr.

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF PMCC FELLOWS

93

PMCC FELLOWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

Data compiled from 2001, including 48 participating countries

COUNTRY	TOTAL
Ireland	7
Belgium	6
Finland	5
New Zealand	5
Spain	5
South Africa	4
Mexico	3
Netherlands	3
France	3
Philippines	2
Syria	2
Greece	2
Iceland	2
Sudan	2
China	2
West Indies	1
Slovenia	1
Poland	1
Hungary	1
Portugal	1
Czech Republic	1
Hong Kong	1
Norway	1
Lebanon	1
Russia	1
Korea	1
Thailand	1
Guyana	1
St. Lucia	1
Brunei	1
Austria	1
St. Kitts	1
Antigua	1
Trinidad & Tobago	1
Romania	1
Nigeria	1
Iran	1

Delgado, who holds the Reuben and Florence Fenwick Family Professorship in the Medical Management of Heart Failure, was invited to stay on at the PMCC, and in the years since, he has become an integral part of the institution. As a cardiologist and heart failure specialist, Dr. Delgado says he is a big proponent of the PMCC's multidisciplinary approach. "Because these patients are very complex and they are critical in many cases, you need a collaborative team," he says. That team can involve nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, psychiatrists and physiotherapists, along with surgeons, cardiologists and radiologists.

"That's how the outcomes in patients with heart failure have improved over the last 10 years, because of this concept of the multidisciplinary team." Two years ago, Dr. Delgado helped create a fellowship to bring in more fellows from Latin American countries. He hopes to continue to build the fellowship program, focusing on bringing in talented people who may lack resources in their home countries.

"I value bringing in physicians from the Middle East, South Asia or Central and South America because I know that we can create a huge global impact by training these people and having them go back to their own country," he says. "I've seen it."

Dr. Sathyaki Nambala
Chief cardiac surgeon, Apollo Hospitals, Bangalore

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: India

Dr. Sathyaki Nambala had two

goals in mind when he

applied to be an international fellow at the PMCC: to train with Dr. Tirone David and learn to do one particular operation. It was the "David Operation" (which is named after Dr. David) – a valve-sparing aortic root replacement. "I was fascinated by that operation," says Dr. Nambala. "During my training, I used to always say if there's one chance to work with this man, I would want it."

Dr. Nambala was at Manipal Hospitals in Bangalore at the time and had a colleague who had trained with Dr. David. The colleague was going to an international conference in Barcelona, Spain, so Dr. Nambala gave him his CV in the hopes he could pass it on to Dr. David. Two months later, Dr. Nambala was on his way to Toronto to be an international fellow at the PMCC. "I actually landed in December," he says. "I'd never seen snow in

my life before." During his time at the PMCC from 2006–07, Dr. Nambala had the chance to work with Dr. David and see the "David Operation" first-hand. "He's probably the best surgeon I've worked with in my life so far, and that experience is something I don't think I'll ever forget," he says.

Dr. Nambala is passing along what he learned at the PMCC to surgeons from India and other parts of Asia. "People now come and watch what we do here," he says. "Many times when I get observed I say, 'I learned this in Toronto.'"

Dr. Carolina Alba
Cardiologist, former LaSorda Family Fellow

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Argentina

Like Dr. Delgado, Dr. Carolina Alba began her medical career in her homeland of Argentina. Also like Dr. Delgado, her positive experiences in the PMCC's international fellowship program convinced her to stay on after her fellowship was over. "One important aspect of the fellowship program at the PMCC is that all are treated with respect," says Dr. Alba. "Fellows and other team members – no matter what their position at the hospital – can give an opinion," she says. "Everybody is heard here."

Dr. Alba says she has also felt

supported as a female physician and a mother. "You feel like there is some flexibility to balance your work and family life (e.g., leaving work to pick up your sick child from school). And that's so very important as well – to work happier and reduce the stress." As someone who now works with international fellows (and was once in their shoes), Dr. Alba says the bonds formed through the fellowship program are lasting ones. "We establish very good relationships with everybody who comes here, so everybody feels engaged," she says. "I am able to tell you that because I have been a fellow until recently, so I know very well the intimate feeling of all the fellows. And when they move back to their countries, we keep the connections, which turn into opportunities to collaborate with patient care and research."

Dr. Matthias Greutmann
Director of the Congenital Heart Disease Unit, University Hospital Zurich

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Switzerland

As a resident at University Hospital Zurich, Dr. Matthias Greutmann developed an interest in adult congenital heart disease and decided to look for some international training in the area. Two of his colleagues had been fellows at the PMCC, so he also applied. "It was well-known that Toronto is the place to be for congenital heart disease," he says. Dr. Greutmann was a fellow at the PMCC from 2008–10, and says he was struck by the "openness" and "spirit" at the hospital. "I always felt extremely welcomed by the team there,"

he says. "From the beginning, everyone was interested in our opinions. I think that was extremely important, and that's what I brought back to Switzerland." Connecting with other international fellows from around the world while at the PMCC has also been a boon, says Dr. Greutmann. "If a patient comes to me and tells me, 'I am going to travel here or there,' I'll say, 'I know someone,' and I'll refer them," he says. "I am still connected all

over the world." And he is always pleased to see his former PMCC colleagues at international conferences, such as the recent World Congress of Pediatric Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery in Barcelona. "The whole Toronto group met for a dinner, and it was very nice," he says. "It's like my Toronto family." 🍷