

I am Mohammad Rafi Fazli, MD, FACS, from Herat, Afghanistan. I have attended the ISW 2024 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

I have had a travelling scholarship to attend this meeting, which helped me to learn the latest health and surgery knowledge, innovations, and research. This congress has offered a unique opportunity for my continuous learning, professional growth, and a deeper understanding of global health challenges.

I was so excited when I got an approval email that I could attend ISW 2024! Indeed, I was so grateful for this great opportunity; my long dream of attending this prestigious meeting came true, and above all, I was looking forward to meeting and interacting with surgeons of this great nation.

The ISW 2024 brought together people of different expertise. I learned some skills in various disciplines, and I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the conference. This was a great meeting; from my perspective, it was a great learning experience; the opportunity to participate in education with international participants was fun, professionally fulfilling and rewarding. In a conference, you learn a lot from different presentations quickly. I learnt various methods of presenting papers.

The ISW 2024 was a success, and the benefits were many. When I interacted with other fellows, each had an experience to share about his work, what he does, challenges and successes. It was rich to learn how people do surgeries in different ways in different countries. Minimal-invasive surgery was practised mainly in developed countries, while surgeons in developing countries did open surgeries because their patients presented late with advanced conditions. Secondly, the infrastructure and equipment suited for these advanced surgeries must be improved. I also noted that, in developed countries, the tradition of doctors interacting with their patients, taking good histories, and conducting clinical examinations has deteriorated as technology has improved. Patients are sent for many investigations before a doctor intervenes. This is contrary to what happens in developing countries where investigative facilities are few; one has to take a good history of the patient's illness, build his/her clinical acumen to make a diagnosis and manage the patient well.

Interacting with senior surgeons of different specialties was enriching, and learning about their contributions to medicine was a big honour for me. I didn't even know some countries existed until I met people from different walks of life and interacted with them. Large countries, or countries with political influence, are commonly taught in geography or history. Still, if no unusual event occurs in a small, distant country, its existence is unknown. We formed a chat group to continue sharing our experiences, consultations, and helping each other. One of the pediatric surgeons has promised to lobby for funds to train more pediatric surgeons in my city because we have only had three to manage a primary children population. Another promised to talk to his friends

to help me and my colleagues gain more surgical skills in their department after listening to my presentation, in which I discussed the challenges of secondary pediatric peritonitis in my country. Others have promised to organise one week, visit me, and do surgeries!

My fellow awardees were genuine in forming connections and offering friendship during our interactions. We all came from different parts of the world but displayed the uniform goal of improving quality surgical care. The group we formed on social media enabled us to interact and communicate with each other during and even after ISW 2024. We hope to continuously communicate, cheer each other on in every new undertaking, and learn from each other as we go along.

There were so many great presentations, many of them taking place simultaneously. Though we could not attend them all, I managed to talk with other colleagues who attended other sessions. We could take photos and record videos of different sessions and share them. I watched the videos later and saw different ways of doing research, innovation and performing surgeries. I also listened to various presentations that I had missed. This was a great innovation because I could share some videos and newsletters with my colleagues when I returned to my hospital. This allowed me to discuss the events at the conference with examples. Mainly, I attended the pediatric surgery sessions; what I learned during the ISW 2024 was inspiring and overwhelming while challenging me to develop more research ideas to collect and establish the data in my community. I hope to encourage more residents in training to consider pediatric surgery as a focus of their research, be it on the basics of pediatric surgery or in the more complex clinical setting.

As a surgeon working in rural Herat (12 hours drive from the capital city), in a very challenging situation, this congress allowed me to travel and see different beautiful places, such as Petronas Tower, a central focus of Kuala Lumpur. We were given special treats, breakfast, lunch, dinners, and entertainment, all great moments to be cherished forever. I could rest from my routine work and am now energised to resume work zealously. In addition, I have expanded my global professional network.