

Sports Medicine Fellowship – Program Helps Orthopaedic Surgeons Specialize and Excel

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Since 2005, new surgeons participating in the New Mexico Arthroscopy and Sports Medicine Fellowship at New Mexico Orthopaedics have been learning from experience — rotating with six fellowship-trained arthroscopy and sports medicine specialists to refine their knowledge and skills in these orthopaedic specialties. New Mexico Orthopaedics is training its third fellow, Michael Thieken, MD, an Indiana native who plans to practice in Indianapolis after completing the fellowship.

After completing their orthopaedic surgery residencies, these MDs are fully qualified to enter practice. However, many opt for an additional year of fellowship training, the highest level of formal instruction available for physicians in the United States. This fellowship has earned ACGME accreditation. Fellows at New Mexico Orthopaedics learn from Tony Pachelli, MD, Sam Tabet, MD, Frank Heckl, MD, John Franco, MD, Kari Babinski, MD, and Doug Allen, MD.

Fellows and the teaching physicians all benefit from the program. “The physicians have the opportunity and stimulation of being in a situation to teach our trade to inquisitive young orthopaedists who are motivated to do high-level arthroscopy,” said Dr. Pachelli. “The fellowship provides the physicians of New Mexico Orthopaedics a way to give back to our profession.”

Extensive Training Regime

“Completing a rotation under each of these physicians allows the fellow to gain a more comprehensive view of how private-practice orthopaedic physicians work, which is knowledge that will help the fellow as he establishes his own practice,” said Dr. Tabet, another one of the program’s pioneering physicians. “The numerous rotations also provide exposure to a greater variety of orthopaedic ailments and treatment techniques because each physician has unique subspecialties and areas of personal interest.”

These rotations include arthroscopic shoulder surgery and total shoulder replacement, arthroscopic rotator cuff repair and shoulder instability reconstruction, knee arthroscopy, meniscal repairs and allografts, autogenous cartilage implantation, ACL and PCL reconstruction, total knee replacement and cartilage restoration techniques, hip arthroscopy, elbow reconstruction, and orthopaedic trauma.

The fellow evaluates patients with the attending physician in the private office and the emergency room. In the operating room, the fellow assists and participates in all surgical cases in the rotation. “As his skills and abilities progress, he is given more opportunities to partake,” Dr. Tabet said. The attending physician is present and scrubbed in during all operative cases to provide guidance and ensure proper technique as necessary. On the sports field, physicians and the fellow provide game coverage, training room support, clinical evaluation, and local treatment of player injuries on Albuquerque-based teams in semi-pro NHL hockey (the New Mexico Scorpions), NBA Development League basketball (the Albuquerque Thunderbirds), and Minor League AAA baseball (the Albuquerque Isotopes).



Hands-On Practice

Working with local professional and high school players gives the fellow practical experience in managing on- and off-field injuries such as closed head injury, lacerations, and dehydration. With close attending supervision, the fellow acts as primary physician for a local high school team, participating in weekly training room coverage, coach and trainer interaction, management of player injuries, and return-to-play decisions.

Aside from tending to patients, educational meetings augment the training. All fellows participate in monthly educational meetings hosted by the physicians of New Mexico Orthopaedics, including a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) conference, a research conference, and a journal club. Basic science and physical therapy conferences also are held on an alternating basis.

“Conferences collectively serve to keep the fellow aware of emerging issues and treatments in the numerous scientific fields relevant to orthopaedic sports medicine,” Dr. Tabet said. Fellows serve as presenters, participants, and organizers. The faculty or specialists, such as cardiologists or exercise physiologists, make presentations. Assigned readings, recently published studies, and articles inform the fellow about medical advances and techniques. The fellow also participates in research activities.

“The fellowship will continue at its present size for a few years, then we may transition to hosting two fellows per year,” Dr. Pachelli said, considering the future of the program. “We will begin to see some of the results of prospective studies we have started. The didactic program and conference schedule will improve and become more refined.”

Sponsorship and support for the fellowship program comes from the New Mexico Orthopaedic Fellowship Foundation, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation whose goal is to support postgraduate specialty orthopaedic education and research.

“It’s a positive part of New Mexico Orthopaedics in that we have a busy facility and expertise in cutting-edge surgical techniques,” said Dr. Tabet. “It is rewarding to impart our knowledge of orthopaedics and life in private practice to young orthopaedic surgeons.”

“As founder and director, I’m pleased to contribute to the specialty training of young orthopaedic surgeons,” Dr. Pachelli said. “I expect this program to continue to grow in coming years, and we look forward to great things.”

For more about the Foundation or Fellowship, visit www.nmorthosportsfellow.com or contact nmfellowship@nmortho.net.