

AO SPINE EUROPE AND SOUTHERN AFRICA LONG-TERM FELLOWSHIP—GUIDELINES

Introduction

Quality, consistency and academic qualification are key elements to a long-term fellowship program. To ensure we achieve these criteria it is necessary to reaffirm the principles and guidelines for AO Spine long-term fellowships taking place in the Republic of South Africa, as part of the AO Spine Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa (AOSESA) fellowship program.

In order to extend the value of this long-term fellowship to all countries in the Sub-Saharan region, every second-year priority will be given to applicants from Sub-Saharan countries other than the Republic of South Africa.

Aims

The purpose of an AOSESA fellowship is to provide additional experience for trained orthopedic and neurosurgeons interested in spinal surgery. It is the responsibility of the host Spine Center to ensure that the fellow becomes conversant in the principles, indications, planning, techniques and complications of spinal surgery and develops the hands-on surgical skills for general spinal practice. Fellows are expected to enthusiastically immerse themselves in all aspects of the program offered by the host center.

Spine Center

AOSESA long-term fellowships are offered uniquely at Tygerberg Hospital and Stellenbosch University, Cape Town and Groote Schuur Hospital-University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa. Applicants must choose and prioritize the Spine Centers, which increases their chances of being accepted.

Duration

AO Spine long-term fellowship runs one year, from 1 January to 31 December, unless agreed otherwise.

Support

An AOSESA stipend will be transferred to the bank account of the fellow on a monthly basis at the beginning of each month. If a regular bank transfer is not possible, additional fees (e.g. for a Western Union transfer) will be deducted from the fellow's stipend. The stipend is calculated based on the current World Bank Purchasing Power Parity in order to cover the costs for food and accommodation in the host country. All travel expenses are the responsibility of the fellow.

To receive the monthly stipend, the fellow must send financial documents certifying how the grant has been spent, and educational feedback showing the progress of the fellowship (her/his activities) and the mentoring process. Incomplete or unsatisfactory documentation may be a cause for termination of the grant.

If family or hotel housing is required, arrangements must be made privately by the fellow himself (AO Spine will not provide any support in arranging accommodation). This can be expensive, and AOSESA cannot cover such additional expenses.

Fellowship application

The long-term Fellowship application form for the following year opens annually at May 1 and closes at May 31. Fellows are kindly asked to use the correct form for long-term fellowships. A fellowship is granted at the discretion of AOSESA, based upon the candidate's application and experience. Successful candidates must meet the following criteria:

- Be a paying member of AO Spine
- Be a spine physician (or in-training, but at least in the 4th year as resident in the specialty), or specialized in Orthopedics, Neurosurgery, or Trauma surgery with a strong interest in spine surgery
- Speak and understand English, as English is the first language in South Africa
- Submit a complete online application form and required documents in time ((1–31 May)
- Have previously participated in an AO Spine Course
- Have not participated in any other AO fellowship within the past two years (from the date when the application is handed in)
- Live and work in a Sub-Saharan African country, other than the Republic of South Africa
- Registration (or ability to register) with the Health Professions Council of South Africa
- Neurosurgery / Orthopedic surgery training completed
- To be practicing in a Sub-Sahara country and to provide a written letter of intent to return to their country of origin to practice for three or more years upon the end of the fellowship period is considered an advantage
- Female candidates will be given priority, in order to enhance the access of women to training opportunities

Required documents

- Letter of Motivation, including country of origin, and their expectations on where to practice after the fellowship (country, description of the environment, private or non-private practice/hospital position)
- Curriculum Vitae
- Copy of medical school diploma
- Copy of medical specialization diploma
- Certificate of at least one AO Spine Course
- Letter of intent to return to civil service in her/his country of origin at the end of the fellowship, for a period not inferior to 3 years

- Letter of recommendation from your superior
- Letter of recommendation from one other professional
- One recent passport sized photograph
- English Language proficiency (mandatory if mother tongue not English, as English is the first language)
- List of publications written or delivered by the applicant (if available)

Applicants are aware that they agreed to the General Terms and Conditions as well as to the Data Privacy Policy of the AO Foundation. In particular, applicants agree and accept that their data and documents are shared with all entities involved in evaluating applications for fellowships. Furthermore, these data and documents will be stored in the database of the AO Foundation. In case a fellowship is granted, the data and documents will also be shared with the responsible Health Care Professional of potential host clinics on a confidential basis. Applicants agree and accept the process of evaluation for fellowships, and that there is no possibility to object decisions taken by AO Spine.

Candidates who are selected will undergo approval by the AO Spine South Africa Country council and the AOSESA Fellowship Board Officer. A personal interview may be required (online or face-to-face).

Applications will only be accepted using the official application form on the AO Spine website. AOSESA will examine the application and complete the process to a final decision. This process may take up to 4 months.

Scoring and decision

All applications that fulfill the criteria are forwarded to the respective Country Council for their advisory feedback. If the feedback to their best knowledge and conscience does not contain any fact-based reason to exclude an applicant (e.g. due to false declarations), all applications will be scored and ranked through measurable indicators, which are:

- AO Spine history: Consecutive years of paid AO Spine membership, participation in AO Spine Courses, participation in other AO Spine events, Faculty in AO Spine events
- Expected career: Age (no exclusion due to age; however, certain age ranges will be scored differently), quality of letter of motivation, strong interest in spine surgery, well defined goals for fellowship, commitment of future engagement with AO Spine
- Past achievements: Publications (non-spinal topics or non-impacted journals), publications in impacted journals, participation in financed research projects
- Social relevance: Applicant works in a low-income country (according to the World Bank), or area with lack of spinal care

Coordination & contact

Prospective fellows are welcome to contact the Spine Center and Fellowship Board Officer, Pedro Berjano MD, for additional information at fellowshipseu@aospine.org. The formal on-line application must be done via the AO Spine website. General AO Spine fellowship questions can be directed to fellowshipsEU@aospine.org.

Confirmation & changes

AOSESA must receive confirmation of acceptance by the applicant within 1 month after a fellowship has been offered. The arrangement is then considered binding. If no response is received within 1 month, AOSESA will be free to reassign the fellowship to another candidate.

Any subsequent wish for change of timing or location may jeopardize the fellowship. Furthermore, if a fellow cannot fulfill the requirements set out in this document, AOSESA may consider early termination of the fellowship.

If a fellow fails to participate to an agreed level or has compromised the learning experience through failure to attend the Spine Center, no certificate will be awarded and future tenures through AOSESA may be jeopardized.

During the fellowship

The fellow is expected to follow the daily routine of the Spine Center and should be available for emergencies at night and on weekends. This is an active "hands on" fellowship, in which the fellow will be expected to participate in all department clinical, research and teaching activities with increasing responsibility as his/her skills develop throughout the year.

English is the first language in South Africa. Fellows must be fluent in English to be granted an AO Spine long-term fellowship at the spine center.

The fellows will be appointed as a supernumerary staff member of the Spine Center and enjoy the medico-legal protection offered to all other staff. The fellow may choose to source additional insurance. AO Spine does not cover any insurance against accident, illness or malpractice.

Evaluations

During the fellowship there will be academic and clinical assessments with continuous feedback to the fellow. Following completion of the fellowship, a confidential evaluation form must be completed and returned to AOSESA within one month. This is a mandatory requirement for each fellow to receive the AO Spine fellowship certification.

The Spine Center is also required to complete a confidential evaluation form upon completion of each fellowship.