

SIU Training Scholarship: Career-Changing Experiences in Medellín, Colombia

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I am today a urologist in practice in India. The road to becoming a consultant is not easy for anyone, but my own journey presented some unexpected obstacles.

During the early months of my urology residency in 2018, I had an accidental fall and sustained a spinal cord injury. My urology training after the accident was very challenging and difficult as I needed to relearn everything in a way suited for my new body. Although I imported a standing wheelchair and modified it to enable me to perform urological procedures, there were some lacunae in my training as the situation was new and unfamiliar to my teachers and supporting staff.

During that time, in 2020, I came to know about Professor Juan Carlos Castaño, from Medellín in Colombia, through one of the educational webinars organized by SIU. I was inspired by his story of becoming a successful established urologist and a pioneer in the field of functional urology, overcoming all the challenges put forward by the spinal cord injury and its sequelae. I was able to contact Professor Castaño through social media platforms, and I am still so grateful for my good fortune in doing so: he was the light I found after travelling so long in the dark following the accident. He became my guide, mentor, and a friend to look up to. Although we were geographically and culturally different, we connected with ease, as we had gone through similar trauma and experience.





Dr Sujith Jose and Professor Juan Carlos Castaño

To get a proper training from him in performing urological surgeries with mobility aids became my priority thereafter. Through Professor Castaño, I contacted Professor Sanjay Kulkarni, who was then president of the SIU, and shared with him my desire to apply for an SIU training scholarship to provide an opportunity to seek training with Professor Castaño. I was fortunate to be the recipient of the 2022 SIU training scholarship. The financial aid I received through the scholarship helped me to cover my travel expenses and cost of living in Colombia. I am also thankful to the CES University for accepting me as an international resident and facilitating my training program.

I started my training 6-month training program in Medellín, with Professor Castaño on September 23, 2023. Professor Castaño organized my training in a very systematic and most efficient way. He taught me the skills and techniques for using the standing wheelchair for surgery with perfection. I saw that he utilized all advanced technologies and globally accepted treatment guidelines to provide quality health care to his patients, and I was fortunate to work with him in a modern urodynamic laboratory equipped with facilities for Videourodynamics. I became aware that he receives referrals from all parts of Latin America regarding functional urology, and I received advanced training in functional urology surgeries, incontinence procedures in males and females, surgeries for bladder outlet obstruction in males and females, and medical and surgical management of neurogenic bladder dysfunctions. Professor Castaño provided hands-on training in various procedures in functional and female urology including Interstim procedure, AUS implantation, ATOMS implantation, intravesical Botox

injection, penile prosthesis, procedures for urinary incontinence in females, and pelvic organ prolapse repair. The highlight of the training program was the experience with the Brindley Sacral Anterior Root Stimulator (SARS) Procedure. I was able to assist at the surgery and see the follow-up of large number of patients implanted with the Brindley device. Professor Castaño has one of the world's largest case series of SARS procedure, and he performs more sacral neuromodulation implantations than any other urologist in Latin America.

I was also fortunate to meet Professor Sanjay Kulkarni during the last days of my training when he visited Medellín for the Annual Reconstructive Workshop organized by CES University.

I am also thankful to the wonderful people of Medellín, Colombia, who were very welcoming, good at heart, and always willing to help me with a smile. I found the city more disabled-friendly than my own country. I was very anxious regarding my daily commute to the hospital with the wheelchair, but the easy availability of taxis and willingness of cab drivers to help with my wheelchair made my travel obstacle-free. This travel also gave me an opportunity to experience the wonderful culture and cuisine of Colombia.

On my return, I have joined General Hospital in Kerala, India, as a consultant urologist. I have started doing female and functional urology procedures at my hospital, utilizing the clinical and surgical acumen I have learned in Medellín. I am in the process of establishing a functional urology department at my hospital.

Apart from the academic training, Professor Castaño influenced me a lot in my life. I have learned from him, his attitude to life, his empathy with the patients, and his care for others. I was greatly influenced by his courage, attitude, and wisdom. Throughout my stay in Colombia, I experienced his brotherly affection, and I had the privilege of learning from a great teacher. To observe and learn from Professor Castaño in performing surgeries while using a standing wheelchair; to be familiarized with the ergonomic changes its use requires in the operating theatre, and the adaptations the professor has instituted to make his life and work comfortable; and to benefit from his experience over the past 20 years were the greatest achievements I had from the training program.

The greatest lesson I have learned from Professor Castaño is that "The Sky is the Limit." Through his life and work he has shown me that everything is possible. However hard a situation may appear, there is always a way to solve it and move forward. This training marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship, and I am proud of and grateful for the companionship and brotherhood we share.

Applying for this training program was one of the best decisions I have taken in my life. This unique learning experience was opened to me through Société Internationale d'Urologie and its scholarship program. I will be forever thankful to SIU for helping me to realize my dream and providing me the support and financial aid at the right time in my career. I hope my training serves as a pilot program and opens opportunities for other surgeons with physical limitations, helping them reach their goal through the SIU Foundation.



Dr Jose and Professor Castaño with Dr Federico Gaviria Gil, Dr Jyotsna Kulkarni, Professor Sanjay Kulkarni, Dr Rafael Castellanos Acosta, and Dr Rafael Maldonado Gomez

