

APAO International Fellowship Report
Subspecialty: Vitreoretinal Surgery
Host Institution: Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC), Singapore
Fellowship Period: 2024–2025

It was an honor to have been selected for the APAO International Fellowship Program in Vitreoretinal Surgery at the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC), one of the leading ophthalmic institutions in the world. According to Scimago 2024 rankings, SNEC is ranked #2 globally in ophthalmology research output, reflecting its strong commitment to innovation, clinical excellence, and academic leadership.

During my fellowship year (2024–2025), I was exposed not only to the high-volume vitreoretinal service at SNEC but also to its partner institutions, including KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKH) and Changi General Hospital (CGH). These attachments provided a broader perspective on the management of both adult and pediatric vitreoretinal conditions in diverse clinical settings.



“A fully equipped operating theatre at KKH (left) and CGH (right).”

My clinical responsibilities involved managing a large volume of patients, averaging 30–50 per session (AM or PM). This allowed me to encounter a wide range of vitreoretinal pathologies, including rhegmatogenous retinal detachments (particularly common in high myopia), macular diseases requiring ILM peeling, diabetic retinopathy, and other complex vitreoretinal disorders.

On-call duties were particularly intensive, with a conservative estimate of at least one retinal detachment case per day during call periods (4-5 RRDs in one day can still happen though). These experiences sharpened both my diagnostic and decision-making abilities under pressure.



“Inside a typical vitreoretinal clinic room at SNEC.”

Over the course of the fellowship, I participated in more than 500 surgical cases where I performed close to 200 cases as a primary surgeon. These included a variety of procedures: scleral buckling, vitrectomies for RRDs or TRDs, ILM peeling for ERMs and macular holes, and combined phaco-vitrectomy cases.

I rotated among 10 consultants, each with unique expertise and approaches. Weekly, I averaged 3–4 operating theatre days, complemented by clinic sessions on the remaining days. This balance ensured steady surgical progression alongside robust clinical exposure.



After a successful ILM peel as primary surgeon (left) together with Andrew, my fellowship supervisor, then fast forward to accomplishing my last ever case, case 181, with Prof Lee, former surgical retina Head of SNEC (right).

The fellowship placed strong emphasis on academic growth. I had dedicated research sessions and access to Singapore Eye Research Institute (SERI), a world-class research facility affiliated with SNEC. I was able to comfortably engage in research projects while maintaining clinical duties. Monthly vitreoretinal rounds, sometimes conducted jointly with institutions abroad (e.g., Taiwan), enriched the academic environment and promoted cross-border collaboration. We were also encouraged to participate in international conferences to showcase our projects.



Monthly Fellow round (left). The Singapore Eye Research Institute “SERI” (right).

From the very beginning, I was challenged to adapt to the high standards set by SNEC's consultants, who are among the most accomplished vitreoretinal surgeons in the region. Entering with minimal prior VR surgical experience, I initially felt the pressure of keeping up. However, the supportive mentorship and structured exposure gradually built my confidence.

By the end of the fellowship, I was confident in handling straightforward vitreoretinal cases independently. While some fellows may seek a second fellowship for additional refinement, I am content with this single fellowship, while remaining committed to continuous learning in private practice.



Hands-on wet lab session honing microsurgical techniques.

Beyond clinical and academic activities, the fellowship was a fulfilling personal journey. The support of consultants and fellow trainees created a collegial environment. We celebrated milestones, faced late-night cases together, and shared memorable moments both inside and outside the hospital.



Evening OT sessions with Donny (left) and the two international co-fellows I was with: Ahmad from Jordan (center) and Ran (right) from Australia.



Dinner with Prof Ian and together with the local residents and fellows.

Completing my APAO fellowship at SNEC has been transformative. I return home with not only improved clinical and surgical capabilities, but also with greater academic perspective, research exposure, and professional maturity. I am deeply grateful to APAO and SNEC for providing me this opportunity, and I look forward to applying these skills to strengthen vitreoretinal care and training in the Philippines.



“Celebrating my birthday and the last days at SNEC with the Surgical Retina Department — marking the completion of a fulfilling year.”