Another week at the Open Medical Institute of the American Austrian Foundation began as medical doctors specializing in the area of cardiac surgery arrived at Schloss Arenberg. It was a fortunately nice week, lacking in much of the usual rain which accompanies the region. The Cleveland Clinic seminar brought faculty from Ohio, USA, as well as from Vienna, Austria, as the Medical University of Vienna also collaborated in the seminar. The faculty were, as always, extremely helpful and open with the fellows, and were always happy to help in any way possible, be it sharing experiences from their time as surgeons, or answering questions not answered during the course of a given lecture.

The fellows had a productive week, to be sure, and seemed to have greatly enjoyed their time. Between lectures they socialized with each other and with the professors, then returned to the hall to learn once again. The learning, however, was not a one-way street. Fellows learned from faculty, but faculty also learned from the fellows, who each presented individual cases on which they had worked. The range of topics, procedures, and curiosities illustrated in these cases made each new presentation all the more interesting and unique, and allowed for new perspectives to be formed from the experiences of others. Such an exchange of information, from one mind in medicine to another, is precisely the goal of the Open Medical Institute, as it aims to improve the field of medicine through a network of experience. Despite differences in culture, availability of technology, and protocols, progress continues to be made each and every week, adding to Dr. Wolfgang Aulitzky’s notion that the future of medicine may indeed be in the East – a notion he shares with each new group of doctors to instill a sense of hope and encourage a positive outlook of what is to come.

The accomplishments achieved during the week prove that the field of medicine is not stagnant, and continues to evolve over time. The fellows, too, have certainly been changed through this experience. They have gained important insight and information, as illustrated through their improved scores on the seminar post-test, and have been versed in the ways of so-called western didactics—perhaps the most universally applicable standard learned through the Open Medical Institute. Regardless of a country’s protocols or the availability of any given procedure, the practice of sharing insight with colleagues and students and requesting help with a difficult case is possible with nothing more than a change of attitude. It is the hope of Dr. Aulitzky that the fellows will follow through with this practice, spreading its prevalence and influence throughout Eastern Europe and parts of Africa and Central America.
Faculty Group Photo, (L-R): Alfred Kocher, MD; Günther Laufer, MD (Co-Course Director); Edward G. Soltesz, MD, MPH (Course Director); Marek P. Ehrlich, MD; Faisal Bakaeeen, MD; Vincent Tobin, BS, CCP

Group Photo of Faculty and Fellows
3 July, Sunday. Repetitio mater studiorum est. Third time I found myself in the front of the Schloss Arenberg, a place devoted to learning and teaching. Something like Hogwarts from Harry Potter, only without Harry. Very warm reception by Wolfgang Aulitzky and Edward Soltesz followed soon after a short walk through overcrowded Salzburg streets (the city is brimming with tourists from all around the world). Like always, dinner gathered people together, some have been here before, some were here for the first time. To me, it was like a summer international camp.

4 July, Monday. Nobody knows enough, but many know too much. A quote from Austrian writer Marie Von Ebner-Eschenbach followed us through the first thing we did on Monday morning. The Pre-Seminar Test. We thought we knew something, but soon after the test was given we realized we still have much to learn. Like a Jedi pupil. The score was Very good, young padawan, but you still have much to learn.

Practice makes perfect so we kept calm and rolled our sleeves. Yes, we can do it. That’s what we came for.

Pre-Lunch Seminars were devoted to aortic surgery in brilliant presentations given by the great educators Edward Soltesz and Faisal Bakaeen from Cleveland. The way they present the topics, share the knowledge and intrigue you to sit and absorb what they have to say is astonishing. Sharing is caring. That’s the American style of teaching. Brilliant.

After we were pretty fed up with cakes during coffee brake and lunch we proceeded to ischemic mitral regurgitation. Simple, smart and elegant. But unfortunately, time for such important topic was running out so we finished after 62 minutes. Next time, I hope there will be more time for mitral talk. But I immediately googled two top articles Edward Soltesz told us we should know by heart. So I did.

And the last thing on our official schedule was Workshop How to Present a Case. Edward Soltesz thought us this through presentation about his love for cardioplegia. Indeed, this was probably one of the highlights of the scientific week. Like Plato used to say „Love is a serious mental disease.“ Great talk. He gave me seven notes I’ll never forget. How things really work in reality. And what we will do if... something goes wrong. Of course it won’t. This was just a hypothetical talk.

5 July, Tuesday. The only thing I really didn’t like about this seminar is the time of first lecture. 8 am. Pretty early for me, although usually I woke up at 5:30 am, and start working at 7 am (I walk an hour to my workplace). But this is the place where things were easy-going so I would prefer starting the Seminars an hour later. My brain starts working a little bit later.

Anyway, minimally invasive surgery and aortic dissection was followed by perfusion strategies by Vincent Tobin. Perfusion is a science, but in my country perfusionist and surgeon are relatively apart from each other, which is in total contrast to our American colleges. We should stick to each other. Cardiac surgery is like a manufacturing before Industrial Revolution.

After the lunch our colleges gave us a short presentation on their cases. All I can say is a quote from somebody I forgot Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you will land among the stars.

When people keep telling you that you can’t do something, you kind of like to try it.
6 July, Wednesday. This was a short day because we were given free afternoon. But before we strolled around the picturesque city, visited the Museum der Moderne Salzburg on Mönchsberg, salt mines in Germany, outlet shopping village or Hangar-8 and The Flying Bulls we gave ourselves deeply into the Deep Hypothermia, Aortic Valve Repair and the Ross procedure. Most of this we still don’t do (aortic valve repair and Ross procedure), therefore this lectures were of extreme importance to me.

Whether we think we can, or we can’t, we are usually right. Yes, we can.

8 July, Thursday. What to say about Thursday? Plato has a theory that we can make any sentence seem profound by writing the name of death philosopher at the end of it.

No, I won’t do this. Yet.

In fact, on Thursday an exchange was done. The American teachers left Salzburg and Austrian teachers came to take that place. The way of teaching is pretty similar to all I was used to during 18 years of my education.

A good teacher, like a good entertainer first must hold his audience's attention, then he can teach his lesson.

Bentall procedure, Mitral Valve Surgery, Dissection. Never enough talking about dissection. Never. Marek Ehrlich gave his best to make this class interactive. This was a real mental Hands-on. Usus est optimus magister.

We were hungry for knowledge. And lunch.

Afterwards we had second part of Fellows’ Case Presentations. Everything went smooth and easy.

And last, but not least, we made a photo today. One photographer used to say What I like about photographs is that they capture a moment that’s gone forever, impossible to reproduce.

Liked the lovely evening chamber music concert.

9 July, Friday. Last day and last supper. Alfred Kocher gave an extremely good talk about the forgotten valve followed by the highly advanced talk about Technical Aspects of Mitral Valve Replacement by Günther Laufer.

The cherry on the top was Mentoring in Cardiac Surgery talk by Alfred Kocher. I was never aware that mentors could be so important. And that to teach is as hard as to be taught. I always thought I can get help from teachers, but I have to learn a lot by myself, sitting alone in a room. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts. That what Alfred Kocher did. He gave me wind in my back.

After the talk we wrote the Post-Seminar Test. We improved. Nothing is stronger than a man who knows. In the evening we had Graduation Dinner in an American way. Again, as we already thought, sharing was caring.

Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come. Victor Hugo.

Thanks to Faculty and Administration of Schloss Arenberg for this wonderful week.