The seminars hosted by the Austrian American Foundation’s Open Medical Institute (OMI) are continuously run with the utmost precision and care to insure a pleasant and educational week is had by all those who travel to Salzburg to attend. The OMI coordinators and directors work tirelessly after each completed week of seminars to improve the program for the future, calling upon comments and suggestions written by fellows to adjust the way things are done. Following last week’s seminar on Diabetes, one fellow noted that the weakest component of the seminar was, simply, and quite humorously, “the weather.” Unfortunately, the weather is one of the few aspects of the OMI seminars which we cannot adjust for the future, and this weak link in our program regrettably persisted well into the week of Maternal & Infant Health. Fortunately, the issue of the weather corrected itself Thursday, when Schloß Arenberg was greeted with warm weather and sunny skies which lasted throughout the final days of the seminar.

Throughout the week, there was also a great deal of relentless, but nevertheless friendly competition between the pediatrically- and gynecologically-focused faculty members, during which each attempted to win over the fellows and prove their respective field as the superior area of Maternal & Infant Health. This competition was fierce, and one would be hard-pressed to name a champion of the seminar, for every lecture given was, as always, of the highest quality and of great benefit to the fellows. Among the highlights of the week were undoubtedly the talks given on chorioamnionitis by course director Dr. Richard Polin and Dr. Alan Jobe, who discussed the condition in relation to “Fetal and Neonatal Morbidities” and described it as “A Most Complex Disease,” respectively. Perhaps the most highly praised lecture of the week was given on “Preventing the First Cesarean” by Dr. George Saade, in which Dr. Saade discussed the risks and consequences associated with cesarean sections, and the ways to most effectively avoid and minimize the incidence of the first procedure altogether. As is often the case, the best way to minimize such incidence is to tackle the issues facilitating its rise, including unnecessary or non-medically indicated procedures.

As women will always comprise approximately half of the population, and many of these women will go on to bear children of their own, these, and other important issues brought up by faculty members Drs. Richard Martin, Friedrich Reiterer, and Ronald Wapner, help to increase the knowledge, safety, and effectiveness of treatment in an area of medicine that will always exist. Fellows will do their part to increase maternal and infant health in their own countries, and have proven by the many “excellent case presentations” chosen this week that progress is truly being made, and efforts are stronger than ever to increase this progress to a yet greater extent. The incredible individuals of this week’s seminar are too many to name individually, but one can be certain of their commitment to patients and patient care, and of their commitment to ever increase the quality with which they work.
Group Faculty Photo, L-R: Richard J. Martin, MD; Friedrich Reiterer, MD (Co-Course Director); Ronald Wapner, MD; George R. Saade, MD; Richard A. Polin, MD (Course Director); Alan H. Jobe, MD, PhD

Group photo of Faculty and Fellows
May 22nd – Sunday Evening.

This is my second visit to Europe and I cannot help but to be impressed by the beauty of its landscapes, mountains, valleys, rivers, architecture and all the nice and peaceful environment.

After a long trip of almost 20 hours, I finally arrived to Schloss Arenberg: a majestic construction that surpassed my expectations; so imposing at first sight but at the same time, warm and cozy.

I was cordially welcomed and I was hosted in a very comfortable room.

After the welcoming cocktail where I had the chance to meet, greet and chat with the professors, great characters of whom I had only had the chance of hearing of (undoubtedly an honor for me), we enjoyed a delicious dinner where I could meet some of the colleagues who were participating in the seminar and who came from various countries of Europe and Asia.

After a brief chat, I could appreciate their various cultures and customs, which was amazing and of great personal growth. At the end of this nice evening, I was overcome by sleep and tiredness….

May 23rd – Monday.

I woke-up at six o’clock in the morning. I was very anxious and excited to begin the day. I got to the dining room to get some breakfast and I ran into Dr. Romero, who also came from Mexico.

I must mention that I didn’t know him but his presence brought me at ease... Finally someone who spoke my language! Until that moment, I was able of communicating with everyone else in English, but the majority of my colleagues shared Russian as the main languages and hence, it prevailed in the environment.

After breakfast, the seminar began. The course’s director Dr. Ricard Polin, welcomed us to the seminar and then he invited us to briefly introduce ourselves. Then he introduced the goal and objectives of the whole seminar. The pre-seminar test was a little overwhelming and it included a lot of questions about neonatology (I am an obstetrician). Nevertheless, I found the questions related to my area of expertise very interesting because they were about many controversial topics of which they had doubts... I would finally have the opportunity of clearing them up!

The first lecture “Chorioamnionitis: fetal and neonatal morbidities” which Dr. Polin was in charge of, was magnificent. Even though it is not my specialty, it helped me understand the point of view of the pediatrician about this controversial pathology.

After the coffee-break, Dr. George Saade and Dr. Alan Jobe introduced “Preterm Labor: An Evidenced Based Approach” and “Chorioamnionitis: A Most Complex Disease” which completed my perspective of this complex pathology which is difficult to diagnose and which is so common in my country. As an obstetrician, I found these two lectures very valuable as they will help me prevent and improve the service I provide to my pregnant patients with the following reduction of morbid-mortality maternal-fetal.
After lunch, we posed for the group picture with the faculty, a magic moment for me, because I was able to be with such important people and in a beautiful place as background as is “Schloss Arenberg”.

We continued working with the masterful lecture of Dr. Ronald Wapner: “Non-invasive Fetal Testing”. Even though we don’t have much experience about this topic in my country, it was very inspiring. We ended the day with “MFM Case Presentations”, in charge of Dr. Saade and Dr. Wapner. A good review of pathologies in our daily work as obstetricians!

After dinner, I spent some time with new friends from Armenia and Albania at the Armenian Lounge... We had great moments of conversation!

May 24th – Tuesday.

I woke up, took a shower and had breakfast.

The lectures today were dedicated to inspire our research instinct “Where Do Ideas Come From” by Dr. Saade. “Lessons Learned from a Career in Transitional Neonatal Research” by Dr. Richard Martin. “Conundrums in Neonatal Clinical Research” by Dr. Jobe. And finally “Planning a Multicenter Trial” with Dr. Saade and Dr. Wapner. I must confess that my comfort area is clinical, but after listening to these wonderful presentations I feel very motivated to explore the world of research.

After lunch my colleagues started their case presentations. It wasn’t my turn to have my presentation at this time, but it was interesting to listen to my colleagues and it was rewarding to participate in the discussions. After dinner, I went out to stroll around Salzburg’s downtown and it was wonderful to admire the moon placing itself above the quiet Salzac River with the imposing and majestic “Festung Hohensalzburg” in the background; symbol of the city. We finished the day by meeting with colleagues again at the Armenia Lounge. We had a great chat and exchange of culture and traditions!

May 25th – Wednesday.

I woke up early, had breakfast because I couldn’t wait... Today was the most important lecture for me! “Preventing the First Cesarean” by Dr. Saade (due to the fact that my country has a high index of it).

It was an excellent presentation and of great learning because I am sure it will be of great benefit to my hospital.

The lectures “Apnea and Reflux” by Dr. Martin, “The Oxygen Controversy” by Dr Polin and “Protective lung Strategies in Mechanical Ventilation” by Dr Friedrich Reiterer completed the day. Even though, they don’t belong to my area of expertise, they were of great informative value is that I can understand my colleagues’ work for neonatology.

We had the afternoon off on this day. We took advantage of this and we visited the most important places of Salzburg and its surroundings; all of this in the company of my colleague from Mexico and new Friends from Armenia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

We enjoyed the lakes, museums, squares and monuments. Salzburg undoubtedly amazed me with its great architecture, rich languages and interesting and kind people. Salzburg is the home of
Mozart. You can listen to his music in almost every street. You can feel close to him and after a few minutes you will see him as he goes out to walk and find his inspiration.

May 26th – Thursday.

I woke-up again very early today. I would present my clinical case on this day! After breakfast, we listened to the lectures of Dr. Polin, Dr. Martin and Dr. Wapner, most of them from the area of neonatology. They were very interesting, especially “Challenges of the Late Preterm Infant” a topic of high obstetric importance.

Now I can say my opinion about the seminar: it was very smart to combine obstetricians and neonatologists in one course, our work complements one another and that’s why we have to know more about how obstetric decisions have repercussions in newborns and at the same time, neonatologists can understand why we proceed the way we do, which sometimes is frowned upon and controversial.

After lunch, the presentations of clinical cases began. Mine would be the first one. I must say I was very nervous, it was very difficult for me to talk about my presentation in 7 to 8 slides (from primary 20) and to introduce my ten-minute speech was a real challenge but I did it!

Unfortunately for me, it was decided that the presentations would be divided into two groups (neonatologists and obstetricians), because even though my clinical case “Chikungunya and Pregnancy”, was an obstetric case, it had more of a perinatal repercussion and thus, of interest to neonatologists (I must mention that among my colleagues Dr. Nemaa from Tanzania attended) which is the place from where this disease originated and that it is not very well known to the rest of the audience and who could have given feedback to my presentation. But because she is a neonatologist, she was placed in the opposite group.

Nevertheless it was very comforting and of great value to listen to the interest and positive commentary regarding my presentation from my fellow doctors even as it was not a known pathology to them. This experience represented a great opportunity of personal and professional growth for me.

In the afternoon, I had the opportunity to visit the fortress “Festung Hohensalzburg”, of great historical value and without a doubt, the best panoramic view of the city. Then, I got to the city center on time for some souvenir shopping and to taste the delicious “Bosna”, a typical snack that originates in Salzburg. As the sun set, we enjoyed the excellent Chamber Music Concert at Schloss Arenberg Gran Hall. It was a moment of art and relaxation.

May 27th – Friday.

It is incredible how time flies!

Last day of lectures, “Health Associated Infections” by Dr. Polin and “Are Amniocentesis & CVS Needed Anymore?” by Dr. Wapner. They were very interesting and informative. “Remaining Questions about Antenatal Steroids” by Dr. Jobe and “Fetal Growth Restriction” by Dr. Saade, were the best way to close the seminar because both are very important topics and controversial in my specialty and with the newly acquired concepts, I know I will be able to improve my medical practice and sharing them with my colleagues in Mexico will be a priority.
The final exam –no less important than the first one-, was solved with more confidence, as it was the consequence of many doubts and cleared questions.

Finally, graduation dinner. What a happy moment! I got my diploma and motivational words from Prof. Wolfgang Aulitzky, Director of the Medical Program. Listening to the comments and congratulations from the professors was very gratifying. Even though it was a solemn moment, it was a fun and nice ceremony, plagued by hugs, pictures and smiles. One could feel the love and affection of everyone present in the environment that in such short time won me over.

We exchanged e-mails, telephone numbers and autographs. Now I have friends in such distant places from my country... I feel so fortunate. I will never forget them!

May 28th – Saturday.

Time to go back home! Go back to family, work, obligations. I would like to say “Thank-you” to all the staff who worked at “Schloss Arenberg”. They were always very attentive and kind to everyone and they made us feel at home.

A big thank-you to the Faculty and Administration of Schloss Arenberg for this wonderful week.

Sincerely,

Rubi Medina.
Sunday, May 29th

Arriving to Salzburg Hauptbahnhof with 40 minutes of delay - that means I won’t make it to the Welcome reception - what a great introduction of myself! Now I have to find the bus stop a take bus no. 6 to Volksgarten. First impression from the train station isn’t really charming, but after 5 inutes in the bus I start telling to myself, that I actually may like this place. Beautiful old buildings covered in the last few sun beams.Finally, I reached Schloss Arenberg - elegant castle hidden in gardens full of scultures. I quickly change my cloths and go to meet other fellows, who are having a drink outside in gardens. After few nice talks is time to go to bed!

Monday, May 30th

The ring bell wakes me up at 7 o’clock, a short glimps out of the window tells me that the sunny weather is not on programme for today, instead of that loads of rain. Doesn’t matter, our lectures will be indoors. Delicious breakfast and strong coffee - what else do you need in the morning? The lectures start with short introduction of the faculty and fellows. The pre-seminar test follows... What difficult questions! I have absolutely no idea about few of them, especially theory of statistics... I am starting to think I have nothing to do here as a graduate with modest amount of experience. But after the test, other fellows assure me they also had troubles.

I am curious about the lectures and they highly overcome my expactations! The speakers are great and funny, not like the boring school lessons I was used to have in faculty. I am really excited from the first day!

Tuesday, May 31st

Today is the day of our case presentation. My Goodness, I am so nervous! In the morning we have a lecture of statistics, still a little bit lost about this topic, but Dr. Sabin is a very good and patient speaker, so in the end I have at least basic knowledge of that mysterious P-value. After that is our favourite speaker from yesterday, who has the ability of spreading his excitement about microbes all over us and maybe all over whole Salzburg - Dr. Salinger :). After lunch instead of a nap I go through my presentation, to make sure everything is all right. Before me there are three presentations, it is interesting to see, that some of the cases are absolutely different from ours, but many of them are very similar. Now it’s my turn. Hope my voice will not shake... People listen, have curious questions and that’s it! There was no reason to stress out at all :)

Wednesday, June 1st

Still raining, unfortunatelly. We are not excited about that, because we were planning to visit historical parts of Salzburg afternoon. Morning time is fulfilled with another great lectures about TB, hepatitis, HIV and...again statistics :). After lunch we decide do visit the city despite the rain. And we are not disappointed at all. All those beautiful churches, old building and small sidestreets are just astonishing! We have a coffee in a stylish caffeteria and nice walk by the river.

Thursday, June 2nd

After breakfast we are meeting new member of faculty - Dr. Downs. Her presentations are full od fun, enthusiasm and interesting information. I am looking forward to next lesson with her :). Dr.
Simon tell us about antimicrobial stewardship, which is quite new for me. After that, we can’t wait to listen to another STD-gross-funny-unbelievable cases from Dr. Rowley from Dublin, I never got bored with him! In the afternoon there is the second part of fellow’s presentations. These cases really amaze me, especially the bubonic plague! In the evening we are pleased to listen to two young japanese men playing violincello and piano - I can’t find the right words to describe that. Just breathtaking!

**Friday, June 3rd**

Oh, no! We just started to know each other and friday is here?? With a bit of nostalgy we listen to last few lessons, last one is Dr. Gulick with a nice "take-home-message" about HIV and hot news about global situation of HIV/AIDS. Then we have the post-seminar test. Now the question don’t seem so unfamiliar. In the evening there is a farewell dinner. Food is again delicious. The faculty members tell us last information about passing the test, they award the best presentations and say good bye.... And of course, a lot of photoses are taken :). After dinner noone wants to go to bed, we want to spent last moments in this nice place with these nice people.

**Saturday, June 4th**

Waiting for the morning train, thinking about the seminar, how much it has brought to me. Tuns of new information, new friends, new experience. Hope I will come back one day!