

Interview

Surgeon in Focus – Professor Arun Ranganathan

Professor Arun Ranganathan is a trauma and orthopaedic spine surgeon at London Spine Care and is one of the UK's leading spinal surgeons who has operated on international dignitaries, celebrities and professional sportsmen. He was recently featured on Channel 5's Operation Live programme, where he performed a spine straightening operation on an 18-year-old. His main areas of interest are spinal surgery, including degenerative, deformity, trauma, spinal injections and minimal invasive spine surgery

SSN: As a specialist in spine surgery, could you tell us more about your experience and training background in this field?

AR: Having completed medical school and foundation training, I underwent basic surgical training in multiple specialities. I then undertook research in the University of Nottingham to complete a doctorate degree, followed by a six-year training programme in orthopaedics and two spinal fellowships in the UK and Canada. Being interested in paediatrics I underwent further specialised training in the Sick Kids hospital in Toronto.

SSN: What drove you to choose surgery as a career – and spinal surgery in particular?

AR: Spinal surgery is a challenging specialty, which requires careful patient selection, skill and precision in surgery in order to achieve good results. The risks can be catastrophic, having severe long-term implications for the patient.

SSN: Are you currently involved in any scientific research within the field of spinal surgery?

AR: Currently, I am the chief investigator for a national trial on thoraco-lumbar fractures (PRESTO), which is funded by the National Institute for Health Sciences Research. I have a special interest in virtual reality and haptic technology. Along with a team of scientists I am developing a haptic model to facilitate training of future generations of surgeon in a safe manner without exposing patients to the risks.

SSN: What's the best part of your job?

AR: The best part of a surgical career is having the facility to be able to practice, teach and research. I am lucky that I have been trained in a sub-speciality where I can change the lives of children.

SSN: What has been the highlight of your career so far?

AR: The highlight of my career has been the opportunity to set up the paediatric spinal unit in Barts Health NHS trust and ensuring a safe practice for seven years.

SSN: You recently appeared on Channel 5's Operation Live to perform scoliosis surgery to straighten an 18-year-old's spine. How was it and what sort of feedback have you received from people?

AR: It was very nerve racking to appear on this programme, and perform a scoliosis surgery live for the first time on national television. It raised awareness amongst the public and showcased some of the excellent work that we do in the NHS. The feedback from public was inspirational and I was very touched by the correspondence received.



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SSN: If you weren't a spine surgeon what would you be?

AR: I have never really thought about it, as being a spinal surgeon has always been my dream, but if I had a choice I would have been a professional tennis player, as tennis is my other passion.

SSN: If you were Health Minister for the day what changes would you implement?

AR: This is a very difficult question and a challenging one. From a surgical point of view, given the challenges the NHS faces, we are acutely short of surgical capacity. We definitely need resources to be directed towards opening more surgical theatres, as there is an acute lack of operating theatre lists. The waiting lists have increased over the years and this is partly contributed to by the lack of surgical operating lists, despite increasing the number of consultant surgeons. The current environment on the NHS has also led to the surgical force leaving the NHS to either go full-time private or move to other countries.

SSN: Away from the clinic and operating theatre – what do you do to relax?

AR: I enjoy hiking, mountaineering, running and tennis. I also enjoy my time with family.

SSN: How do you think the future looks in the field of spine



surgery?

AR: The future of spinal surgery lies in minimal access techniques, which minimises tissue trauma and promotes early rehabilitation. Regenerative medicine is showing a lot of promise and attempts to cure arthritic and degenerative conditions of the spine with biological techniques. Robotic navigation has shown promise in the placement of spinal implants but the use is still restricted. The increased surgical time, exposure to radiation, accuracy and cost is presently not justifiable. The use of virtual reality and haptics to train spinal surgeons is valuable and certainly has a bright future.

FH ORTHO HPA