

Final Report

APASL (Asian-Pacific Association for the Study of Liver) Early Career Fellowship 2025

Awardee: **Dr. Soe Thiha Maung**
M.B.,B.S. (Ygn.), MRCP (UK), MBA
M.Sc. (Clinical Sciences Hepatology)

Fellowship Duration: July 2025 – October 2025

Host Institution: Asan Liver Center, Department of Gastroenterology
Asan Medical Center, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Jonggi Choi, M.D, Ph.D
Assist. Prof. Dr. Sung Won Chung, M.D, Ph.D



Introduction

I am deeply honored to submit this Final Report for the **APASL (Asian-Pacific Association for the Study of Liver) Early Career Fellowship 2025**, which I successfully completed at the Asan Liver Center, Asan Medical Center, Seoul, Republic of Korea, under the esteemed supervision of Prof. Dr. Jonggi Choi and Assist. Prof. Dr. Sung Won Chung. This three-month fellowship, from July to October 2025, provided a unique opportunity to advance my professional and clinical training in Onco-Hepatology, Clinical Hepatology, and Transplant Hepatology, aligning with my academic pursuit as a Doctoral Fellow in Hepatology at the Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

The APASL Early Career Fellowship has been a transformative experience that significantly enriched my understanding of the multidisciplinary management of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), liver transplantation, and advanced clinical hepatology. The program fostered not only academic and clinical growth but also strengthened international collaboration within the Asia-Pacific hepatology community.

Objectives of the Fellowship

The key objectives of my fellowship were:

1. To gain hands-on and observational clinical experience in managing complex hepatology and liver cancer cases within a high-volume tertiary liver center.
2. To understand and participate in the multidisciplinary approach for HCC management, integrating hepatology, interventional radiology, surgery, and oncology.
3. To observe and learn the management of pre- and post-liver transplant patients, including the assessment, surgical, and post-operative care processes.
4. To enhance research capacity through collaboration and data collection in the field of onco-hepatology and transplant hepatology.
5. To foster regional cooperation and professional networks through participation in academic meetings and scientific discussions.

Description of Fellowship Training Activities

(1) Clinical Hepatology Training (6 weeks)

The initial phase of my fellowship was dedicated to Clinical Hepatology Training at the Asan Liver Center. Each day began with Morning Table Meetings, where patient cases were presented and discussed comprehensively among hepatologists, trainees, and fellows.

These sessions provided in-depth insights into diagnostic reasoning, treatment decision-making, and individualized patient management strategies.



I actively participated in in-patient ward rounds, observing the management of patients with chronic viral hepatitis, cirrhosis, and HCC. In out-patient clinics, I observed consultations for follow-up of liver disease patients, antiviral therapy management, and surveillance protocols for high-risk populations.

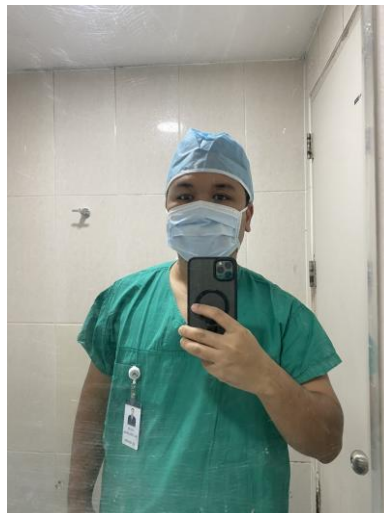


Additionally, I was exposed to endoscopic procedures, including esophageal variceal ligation (EVL), and ultrasonographic assessments for liver disease patients, which strengthened my practical understanding of non-invasive hepatology procedures.



(2) Transplant Hepatology Training (4 weeks)

The second phase of the fellowship focused on Transplant Hepatology at the Department of Liver Transplantation and Hepato-biliary Surgery. Under close supervision, I observed both pre-transplant evaluations and post-transplant management of patients with end-stage liver disease and HCC.



I attended live liver transplantation operations and observed surgical techniques, graft selection, and intraoperative coordination among surgical and anesthetic teams. The postoperative management sessions provided invaluable experience in monitoring graft function, managing immunosuppression, and recognizing early complications such as rejection or infection.

This segment of training significantly enhanced my understanding of the continuum of liver transplant care—from donor and recipient selection to long-term follow-up—which is highly applicable to advancing liver transplantation practices in my country.

(3) Interventional Hepatology Training (2 weeks)

In the final phase, I was attached to the Department of Radiology to observe a range of interventional hepatology procedures. This included exposure to Transarterial Chemoembolization (TACE), Transarterial Radioembolization (TARE), and percutaneous ablation procedures such as Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA), Microwave Ablation (MWA), and Cryoablation.

I also observed ultrasound-guided liver biopsies, and multidisciplinary discussions determining the appropriate locoregional therapy for each HCC case. The experience deepened my understanding of the technical aspects and decision algorithms guiding interventional treatment of liver tumors, complementing my clinical training in onco-hepatology.



Research and Academic Activities

During the fellowship, I initiated a research collaboration with the Asan Liver Center team, focusing on a project within the field of onco-hepatology. Data collection and verification were completed during my stay, and preliminary analysis is currently in progress. This ongoing research aims to contribute to better understanding and management of HCC within real-world clinical settings.

I also participated in weekly academic conferences and journal clubs, presenting clinical cases and engaging in scientific discussions led by faculty members. These academic activities fostered intellectual exchange and critical thinking while encouraging collaborative learning.

Participation in Conferences and Scientific Meetings

During the fellowship period, I attended two major academic conferences in Korea, which further enriched my professional experience:

(1) **Liver Transplantation Update (LT Update) 2025** – Organized by the Korean Liver Transplantation Society, held in Incheon, 5–6 September 2025.

The meeting provided comprehensive updates on surgical techniques, donor selection criteria, and immunosuppression strategies.

I had the opportunity to interact with world-renowned hepatobiliary surgeons and transplant hepatologists, broadening my perspectives on clinical practices and innovations.





(2) **The 11th International Viral Hepatitis Elimination Meeting (IVHEM)** – Held in Seoul, 12–13 September 2025.

The conference offered valuable insights into the progress and challenges in viral hepatitis elimination strategies worldwide.

Discussions on finite therapy for chronic hepatitis B and the integration of real-world data into policy frameworks were particularly relevant to my doctoral research focus.





Major Achievements and Key Takeaways

Through this fellowship, I achieved several professional milestones and learning outcomes, including:

- Gained first-hand exposure to the multidisciplinary management of HCC involving hepatologists, radiologists, surgeons, and oncologists.
- Strengthened clinical acumen in liver transplantation and advanced hepatology through structured observation and mentorship.
- Acquired practical skills and updated knowledge in interventional hepatology procedures, including TACE, TARE, and ablation therapies.
- Initiated an ongoing collaborative research project at Asan Liver Center in the field of onco-hepatology.
- Expanded professional networks within the Korean and Asia-Pacific hepatology community.
- Enhanced leadership capacity and vision for implementing evidence-based hepatology practices and multidisciplinary HCC management in my home country.

Reflections

The APASL Early Career Fellowship has been a pivotal step in my academic and clinical journey. The structured training at Asan Medical Center allowed me to integrate clinical knowledge with research perspectives and to observe best practices from one of the leading liver centers in Asia.

Beyond the clinical and research exposure, this fellowship also cultivated a deep sense of professional collaboration, humility, and commitment to advancing hepatology in resource-limited settings. It inspired me to continue pursuing excellence in hepatology and to share this experience with colleagues and trainees at my home institution, contributing to capacity building and patient care improvement in the region.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the APASL Executive and Steering Committee for awarding me the APASL Early Career Fellowship 2025 and for their continued commitment to fostering early-career development among hepatologists in the region.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to Prof. Jonggi Choi and Prof. Sung Won Chung of the Asan Liver Center, Department of Gastroenterology, Asan Medical Center, for their invaluable mentorship, guidance, and generous support throughout my fellowship.

I would also like to express sincere thanks to my mentor, Prof. Roongruedee Chaiteerakij, Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, for her unwavering guidance, mentorship, and encouragement that made this fellowship possible.

I am also grateful to the APASL Secretariat for their excellent coordination and logistical support before and during my training, which ensured a smooth and productive fellowship experience.

Finally, I extend my appreciation to the Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University, for their endorsement and continuous academic mentorship that allowed me to represent the institution at an international level.



Conclusion

The APASL Early Career Fellowship 2025 has been an invaluable and enriching experience that profoundly enhanced my clinical competence, research proficiency, and international collaboration in hepatology. The opportunity to train under distinguished mentors at Asan Medical Center has significantly shaped my career trajectory as a clinician-scientist in hepatology.

I am deeply grateful to APASL for this opportunity and remain committed to applying the knowledge and skills gained to advance hepatology practice, research, and education within the Asia-Pacific region.

Respectfully submitted,

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