

History of the ABC Travelling Fellowship

The ABC Fellowships were conceived and developed in 1948 by Dr R I Harris of Toronto, Canada during his term as President of the American Orthopaedic Association. Dr Harris believed that because of World War II and post-war difficulties, young orthopaedic surgeons might find it difficult to visit orthopaedic centres in Canada and the United States of America.

He was concerned that "they would reach senior positions in England with little knowledge of the state of orthopaedic surgery in North America." Together, R I Harris, President of the American Orthopaedic Association, J E Samson, President of the Canadian Orthopedic Association and S A S Makin, President of the British Orthopaedic Association, organised the visit of the first ABC Fellows to North America in 1948. In all, thirteen Fellows and one honorary Fellow from Great Britain visited orthopaedic centres in North America and attended the combined meeting of the Canadian, British and American Orthopaedic Associations held in Quebec City. These first exchange fellows were funded through the combined efforts of the three associations.



*The 1948 first British group to visit North America. Left to right:
James Patrick, Jim Ellis, John Charnley, Derick Strange, Pip Newman,
Freddie Durbin, John Adams, Marion Pearson, John Fairbank, Ian Smillie,
Jimmy Wishart, Cecil Langton, Edgar Somerville.*

In 1949, the British Orthopaedic Association hosted five American and ten Canadian orthopaedic surgeons at orthopaedic centres in Great Britain. For the years 1950 to 1953, the exchange visits ceased, being resumed once more in 1954 under the guidance of J Dickson, President of the American Orthopaedic Association and Sir Reginald Watson-Jones, President of the British Orthopaedic Association. Initially, in odd-numbered years, North American Orthopaedic surgeons selected as ABC Fellows travelled to Great Britain and in even-numbered years, British surgeons travelled to North America. Since 1985, North American Fellows have visited the Southern Hemisphere as well as Great Britain.

In 1954, a Fellow was selected from either Australia, New Zealand or South Africa to take part in the programme in North America, and this involvement of AOA has continued to this day. By 1999, 45 Fellows had travelled from the Southern Hemisphere countries to North America, 19 of these being Fellows of AOA.

At first, the Southern Hemisphere participants shared a single Fellowship and rotated their involvement over a six-year period. Later, in 1965 the number of fellows from the Southern Hemisphere was increased to two participants in even-numbered years when the programme took place in North America. Since 1982, however, each of these three countries may elect to send a Fellow to North America every two years.

The name of the Fellowship derives from the initials of the original three participating countries – America, Britain, Canada. It was coined by the original Fellows who travelled to North America in 1948 at a reunion after their return to Britain in relation to a "club" formed by and for the Fellows (the ABC Club). The club has its own tie and all participants in the ABC Fellowship scheme automatically become members of the ABC Club.