

BrizBrain & Spine Research Foundation set to benefit from neurosurgery trainee program

BrizBrain & Spine is set to become the first private health sector participant in a neurosurgery training program for medical graduates. The research year, a compulsory part of achieving formal qualification as a neurosurgeon, is normally undertaken in the public system. Instead, Dr Jason Papacostas will be Australia's first neurosurgery trainee to complete his research year working with two of the country's premier neuro-clinicians, Dr Terry Coyne and Dr Peter Silburn. His research will focus on Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) – a type of surgery that targets a specific area of the brain to suppress excessive neurological activity that typically manifests as tics, tremors and other movement disorders.

Drs Coyne and Silburn have undertaken more DBS than any other neurosurgical team in the southern hemisphere and it was these credentials that encouraged Dr Papacostas to approach BrizBrain & Spine about joining the team for his research year.

"I first heard about Drs Coyne and Silburn and their pioneering DBS work when I saw the '60 Minutes' story on the Tourette's patient, Bianca Saez. While DBS is well-established as a treatment for Parkinson's, it is still regarded as somewhat experimental in the management of other conditions like Tourette's syndrome," Dr Papacostas said.

"The aim of my research is to better understand DBS and its potential applications. I plan to closely monitor Parkinson's patients who undergo DBS: interview them, monitor their progress and analyse the outcomes. I also want to expand the patient database to include people who have DBS for other conditions including depression and obsessive compulsive disorder.

"This larger sample size will hopefully yield results that can be formally and objectively assessed to deepen our understanding of DBS and perhaps identify new ways the surgery can be used.

"I feel honoured to be joining such an experienced and successful team and to be working with health care leaders like Drs Coyne and Silburn. It's a great opportunity."

A University of Queensland medical school graduate, Dr Papacostas completed his internship at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. He commenced the Neurosurgery Training Program in 2007 and is set to qualify as a Neurosurgery Fellow in 2011.

"I was first exposed to the field of neurosurgery in 2005 and found it fascinating. I'm drawn to surgery as a profession and neurosurgery is its most challenging and demanding form. It's also the most rewarding. It genuinely gives patients a new lease of life and being a part of that remarkable transformation is a real privilege," he said.

Dr Papacostas joined the BB&S team in January.