

AO SPINE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTHERN AFRICA SHORT- TERM FELLOWSHIP—GUIDELINES

Introduction

Quality, consistency and academic qualification are key elements to a fellowship program. To ensure we achieve these criteria it is necessary to reaffirm the principles and guidelines for AO Spine Middle East and Northern Africa (AO SMENA) fellowships.

Aims

The purpose of an AO SMENA fellowship is to provide additional experience for trained orthopedic and neurosurgeons interested in spinal surgery. It is the responsibility of the host Center to ensure that the fellow becomes conversant in the principles, indications, planning, techniques and complications of spinal surgery and develops the hands-on surgical skills for general spinal practice. Fellows are expected to enthusiastically immerse themselves in all aspects of the program offered by the host Center.

AO Spine Centers

Short-term fellowships are offered in official AO Spine certified AO Spine Centers (further details on the AO Spine website), namely hospitals or clinics throughout the regions. Applicants must choose and prioritize a minimum of 3 Spine Centers, which increases their chances of being accepted. However, the final decision regarding choice of AO Spine Center will be made on the basis of the number of applications and availability of the AO Spine Center.

An AO Spine fellowship cannot be done in an AO Spine Center where the fellow already works, or in a hospital that is not certified as AO Spine Center.

Duration

AO Spine offers short-term fellowships that range in **duration from one week up to 6 weeks**. No long-term fellowships are offered within the AO SMENA Fellowship program.

Support

An AO SMENA stipend for each fellow will be transferred to the bank account of the fellow once the fellowship has started, based on availability of the required budget. If a regular bank transfer is not possible, additional fees (e.g. for a Western Union transfer) will be deducted from the fellow's stipend. The stipend is calculated based on the current World Bank Purchasing Power Parity in order to cover the costs for food and accommodation in the host country. All travel expenses are the responsibility of the fellow or sponsor.

Some Centers provide a simple accommodation for the fellow. If family or hotel housing is required, arrangements must be made privately by the fellow himself (AO Spine will not provide any support in arranging accommodation). This can be expensive, and AO SMENA cannot cover such additional expenses.

Fellowship application

The Fellowship application form for 2024 fellowships will open on **August 2nd 2023 until September 1st 2023**. Fellows are kindly asked to use the correct form from their respective region (referred to their working country).

Applications can only be accepted using the official application form on the AO Spine website. Incomplete applications will not be considered and will be rejected automatically

An AO SMENA short-term fellowship is granted at the discretion of AO SMENA, based upon the candidate's application and experience. Successful candidates must meet the following criteria:

- Be a current member of AO Spine
- Be a spine physician (or in-training, but at least in the 4th year as resident in the specialty), or specialized in Orthopedics, Neurosurgery, or Trauma surgery with a strong interest in spine surgery.
- Speak and understand English, or the local language where the AO Spine Center is located.
- Submit a complete online application form and required documents in time (2 August – 1 September)
- Have not participated in any other AO fellowship within the past two years (from the date when the application is handed in)
- Not being a current Country Council Officer
- Have previously participated in AO Spine Course (with practical exercises). For 2024 applications, Hospital Based Seminars and Face to Face Seminars will be accepted, course attendance receive higher ranking.

Required documents

- Letter of motivation
- Curriculum vitae
- Copy of medical school diploma
- Certificates of AO Spine Course/courses or Seminars. Please submit all certificates from all attended events
- Letter of recommendation from your superior (with signature and contact details)
- Letter of recommendation from one other professional (with signature and contact details)
- 1 recent passport sized photograph
- Copy of passport or valid ID
- List of publications written or delivered by the applicant (if available)
- English Language certificate or equivalent proof of proficiency (mandatory if native language is not English)

Scoring and decision

All applications that fulfill the criteria are forwarded to the respective Country Council for their advisory feedback. If the feedback to their best knowledge and conscience does not contain any fact-based reason to exclude an applicant (e.g. due to false declarations), all applications will be scored and ranked through measurable indicators, which are:

- AO Spine history: Consecutive years of paid AO Spine membership, participation in AO Spine Courses, participation in other AO Spine events, Faculty in AO Spine events
- Expected career: Age (no exclusion due to age; however, certain age ranges will be scored differently), quality of letter of motivation, strong interest in spine surgery, well defined goals for fellowship, commitment of future engagement with AO Spine
- Past achievements: Publications (non-spinal topics or non-impacted journals), publications in impacted journals, participation in financed research projects
- Social relevance: Applicant works in a low-income country (according to the World Bank), or area with lack of spinal care

The AO SMENA AO Spine Centers & Fellowships Officer will examine the application and the candidate will be contacted with a decision. This process may take up to 4 months after the submission deadline of September 1.

Coordination & contact

All fellowships are organized by AO SMENA. Direct arrangements between candidate and Center are not permissible. Please contact in case of any question fellowshipsME@aospine.org.

Confirmation & changes

AO SMENA must receive confirmation of acceptance by the applicant within one month after a fellowship has been offered. The arrangement is then considered binding. If no response is received within one month, AO SMENA will be free to reassign the fellowship to another candidate.

Any subsequent wish for change of timing or location may jeopardize the fellowship, a maximum of 2 changes is allowed, subject to availability of Spine Center and budget. Furthermore, if a fellow cannot fulfill the requirements set out in this document, AO SMENA may consider early termination of the fellowship.

If a fellow fails to participate to an agreed level or has compromised the learning experience through failure to attend the Center, no certificate will be awarded and future tenures through AO SMENA may be jeopardized.

During the fellowship

The fellow is expected to follow the daily routine of the Spine Center and should be available for emergencies at night and on weekends. AO Spine fellowships are usually considered to be observerships. Thus, active participation as a scrubbed assistant may be possible, but can't be guaranteed. In case a fellow may be allowed to assist operations scrubbed in, for legal reasons the fellow will not be permitted to perform surgery.

Fellows will not be insured against accident, illness or malpractice through either AO SMENA or the Spine Center. It is the responsibility of each fellow to ensure that their medical insurance covers medical treatment in foreign countries. Furthermore, it is strongly recommended that the fellow takes out malpractice insurance prior to starting the fellowship.

Some Spine Centers suggest, by way of an introduction, that fellows give a short presentation to staff. This can be on a subject or topic with which the fellow is familiar or actively involved. We recommend that fellows communicate with the AO Spine Center upon confirmation of fellowship to enquire about this.

English is spoken by medical staff at many Spine Centers. However, some staff members and patients may only speak their mother tongue, and staff meetings, ward rounds and outpatient clinics may be held in local language. Therefore, it is advisable to acquire some knowledge of local language before the fellowship begins, allowing for better communication and integration. White coats may be provided by the Spine Center, however, to be sure please check this prior to starting the fellowship.

Evaluations

The AO SMENA short-term fellowship program can only develop with the help of constructive and honest feedback from each fellow. Following completion of the fellowship, an evaluation form must be completed and returned to AO SMENA within one month. This is a mandatory requirement for each fellow to receive the AO SMENA fellowship certification. This form will be shared with the AO Spine Center, and the AO SMENA Board Officer for Spine Centers and Fellowships.

The AO Spine Center is also required to complete an evaluation form upon completion of each fellowship, which will be shared with the fellow, and the AO SMENA Board Officer for Spine Centers and Fellowships.

By submitting the application, applicants agree to the terms of this Guidelines as well as to the Data Privacy Policy of the AO Foundation. Applicants agree and accept to have their data and documents shared with all stakeholders involved in evaluating the application and allocating the fellowship. In case a fellowship is granted, the data and documents will also be shared with the host clinic. Applicants agree and accept the process of selection and allocation of fellowships without the possibility to object decisions taken by AO Spine.