

ACFAS 2023 Meet the Fellow Questionnaire



American College of
Foot and Ankle Surgeons®

Fellow Name:

Helene Cook, DPM, AACFAS

Fellowship Program:

Northern California Reconstructive Foot and Ankle Fellowship

City/State:

Redding, CA

Program Director:

Jason Nowak, DPM, FACFAS

How many Attendings do you work with regularly?

Majority of the fellow's cases are with two main foot and ankle surgeons, Dr. Strand and Dr. Nowak. There are also two ortho trauma surgeons who the fellow has the opportunity to scrub cases with. The fellow has the opportunity to pick whichever cases they are interested in covering.

Describe the diversity of your cases so far in fellowship. (For example, has your experience included TAR? Is there an emphasis on: Pediatrics? Sports Medicine? Deformity correction? Complex reconstruction? What percentage of your cases are trauma? Rearfoot/ankle? Forefoot? Please be as descriptive as you'd like.

The focus is split between ankle, rear foot and forefoot reconstruction with an emphasis on total ankle replacements, complex revision surgery, acute and chronic trauma, sports medicine, reconstructive cases.

The fellow will complete about 600 - 700 cases/year with the bulk of cases being larger reconstructive work.

How many days per week do you typically spend in the OR? In clinic? Do you have your own "fellow" clinic?

Two full days of clinic. The fellow runs off Dr. Nowaks clinic schedule, normally seeing 60-75pts total so about 25-40 patients as

the fellow. The fellow will see, treat, and bill patients on your own. Injections, surgical consults, pre and post ops. No palliative care.

Three full days of OR. Dependent on facility, either in one or two ORs. Add on trauma cases are common in the PM any day

of the week. Weekend cases with trauma doctors are optional. Cases range from 4-12 cases/day.



How many surgical cases do you typically scrub per month?

The fellow will generally scrub anywhere from 15-20 cases in a week with about 60 to 80 in a month.

What conferences have you attended/are you encouraged to attend?

The fellow and director attend ACFAS each year. You are allowed to attend any of the fellowship courses offered.

Fellow will also have to opportunity to speak at local hospital conferences and assist with making presentations.

How would you describe your director's teaching style?

Attendings set very high expectations and challenge your ability to think critically in clinic and in OR. Consistency, efficiency, and repetition are all emphasized on a daily basis. See one, do one, teach one.

How is research incorporated into your experience? What resources are provided/available?

Research is encouraged for those interested but not an emphasis of the program. Large volumes of patients

to pull from with long term follow-up. Poster or manuscript presentation at ACFAS is encouraged.

Do you take any "call"? If so, how often? What type of call? (general vs. trauma, hospital vs. private practice?)

The fellow takes call for the practice on weekday evenings/nights and over the weekend. Generally answering

post op questions. Occasional consults at the hospital but rarely overnight.

How many hospitals/surgery centers are you credentialed at?

We currently operate out of two main hospitals, and two main surgery centers within Redding. All facilities are within 10-

15 min from each other.

What is your didactic schedule like? What academic opportunities are available to you during fellowship? (Cadaver labs, journal club, radiology conference, etc.)

The fellow presents the weekly cases at radiology rounds every Tuesday AM. Monthly group journal clubs. Monthly case presentations with the MKE residents.

Is your fellowship affiliated with a residency program? If yes, what are your responsibilities?

How often are you interacting with residents (What % of cases?)

Yes, we have an affiliation with the Ascension program in Milwaukee, WI. Each resident spends two weeks with us in clinic and surgery. We do a monthly academics via zoom.



Are you able to collect cases for board certification?

No, cases are not counted toward board certification. With a well-rounded and the advanced training received, the fellow should be able to accumulate these in the years post fellowship without issues.

When should interested applicants visit? What does a visit look like?

For applicants interested in the program, they should reach out via the email address on the ACFAS website. After review of applications received, visitation are offered to selected applicants.

Visits are two days in order to see the clinic, the OR as well as the local area.

What is the interview process like at your program?

Applications are generally due around April 1st. We then invite applicants out for a two-day visitation during the months of May-July. We then select applicants for a zoom academic interview in August with selection of next fellow by mid-August.

Do you have a co-fellow? What percentage of your cases are scrubbed with them?

We only take 1 fellow per year! You get to scrub whatever cases you want!

What support is available for finding post-fellowship employment?

Attendings will make calls on your behalf, write letters of recommendation, etc. Attendings are happy to read over contracts and support any time off you need to visit employment options.

What qualities make an applicant a good fit for your program?

We look for someone who is well rounded, willing to work hard, learn, grow, take feedback and be adaptable.

We look for someone who is self-motivated and self-driven. What you put into fellowship, is what you get out of it!

Why did you apply for fellowship? And why did you choose your fellowship program?

I wanted to continue to enhance my already well-rounded training, perform repetition and become a more efficient surgeon in advanced reconstruction. I desired the lifelong mentorship and to expedite my first years of practice.

Any advice for future fellowship applicants?

Talk to as many current and previous fellows at as many different programs about their experiences.

Find a program that meets your needs/desires. Not every program is perfect for every person. Be yourself, stay humble in the process, continue to work hard, and learn all you can at your current residency program.

