



*Pictured:
Ralph Mobbs*

Spinal trauma and spinal tumours

SYDNEY NEUROSURGEON MR

Ralph Mobbs used the funding attached to the Stuart Morson Scholarship in Neurosurgery to study and work at the prestigious University of British Columbia's Spinal Injuries Unit. Mr Mobbs spent 2005 at the unit in Vancouver completing his Fellowship in Neurosurgery and spent two-thirds of the year working in clinical practice and one-third on his research.

"My interest is in complex spinal trauma and spinal tumours and the unit in Vancouver is one of the few sub-specialty units which deals only with such complex spine work. In Canada, they have a system in which all complex spine cases go to the one unit which is staffed by seven specialist surgeons. The huge benefit of working in such a unit is that it allows people in this field to become very good at more complex spinal surgery much faster because it is all they do," he said.

Mr Mobbs, who now works out of the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, said his research involved analysing both the surgical techniques used and the outcomes of various spinal surgical procedures including the treatment of thoracic spinal trauma and spinal tumours.

"We looked at the indicators of surgery and the outcomes. That is, we asked: can it be done and if so which patients will get the most benefit?"

"Given that so much of surgery is about deciding which patients will most benefit, we believed that finding the answers to these questions using research methodology would help surgeons in both the choices they made and surgical outcomes," he said.

Mr Mobbs said most of the spinal trauma seen in the Canadian unit related to activities



Ralph & his wife Lisa with Red & Clementine

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involving "tall mountains and gravity" such as skiing, snow-boarding and mountain biking injuries.

Along with the skills picked up in Canada, he is now also specialising in minimally-invasive surgery for spinal injuries at the Prince of Wales Hospital which is only one of two hos-

pitals in NSW with a dedicated spinal unit. "While keyhole surgery is not new, applying it to spinal injuries is quite a recent development," he said.

"It is fiddly and some operations take longer than open surgery so it has not been embraced by all spinal surgeons or hospital administrators. But like all other minimally-invasive procedures, the patient spends less time in hospital and quite often heals more quickly," he said.

The Stuart Morson Scholarship in Neurosurgery was established following a generous donation by Mrs Elisabeth Morson in memory of her late husband. The Scholarship is designed to assist young Neurosurgeons within five years of obtaining the Colleges' Fellowship or Neurosurgical Trainees to spend time overseas furthering their neurosurgical studies by undertaking research or further training.

The value of the Scholarship is \$20,000 and is designed to assist the recipient to meet the costs of undertaking further training and/or research work in the field of Neurosurgery.

From time to time, the Scholarship may also be applied to assist overseas surgeons to spend time in Australia or New Zealand to further their training and/or research in Neurosurgery.

Mr Mobbs, who is also a lecturer at the University of New South Wales, received the scholarship in 2006. He thanked Mrs Morson for her generosity in sponsoring the scholarship. "Most Fellowships are not very well paid and the Vancouver Fellowship was no exception. The scholarship funding helped with travelling and relocation costs and it would have been difficult to dedicate myself to the work being done there without it," he said.