

EDITORIAL

Global Surgery: advent of a new discipline

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Global surgery is a rapidly developing multidisciplinary field, aiming to provide equitable and improved surgical care across international health systems often with a focus on underserved populations of low- and middle-income countries¹. History is witness that Christian Missionaries, International Committee of the Red Cross, Aga Khan Foundation and Islamic Association of North America have been offering humanitarian health support, including Surgery, to the needy since long. These were joined by League of Nations Health Organization (since 1920; later became the World Health Organization in 1946) and *Médecins Sans Frontières* (since 1971)². However, Surgery remained 'The neglected stepchild of global health'³. Main reason for this was lack of data leading to knowledge gap about the magnitude of the problem. The much needed catalyst for development of Global Surgery was the launch of Lancet Commission on Global Surgery report in January 2014⁴. This report provided the much needed data about unmet needs of Surgery which grabbed the World's attention: 5 billion people not having access to safe, timely affordable surgery and anaesthesia; leading to 18.6 million preventable early deaths each year - more than the number of people who die from HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined; millions of patients facing catastrophic expenditures when faced with surgical costs and many low- and middle-income countries likely to lose up to 2% of GDP due to loss of proper surgical care leading to loss of productivity. They also predicted that to reach the necessary levels of access to surgery by 2030 would require an investment of \$420 billion, which would save an estimated \$12 trillion in lost GDP over the same period, making it a very sound investment. And global burden of surgical disease was estimated to be ~ 30%⁵.

These data prompted the World Health Assembly to unanimously pass a resolution to recognise surgical care as a critical and integral component of universal health coverage in 26 May 2015. This momentum was picked up by funders like World Bank, and other stakeholders like World Health Organization, Surgical academic associations and institutions, the biomedical devices industry, and news media and advocacy organisations who took notice and led to a roadmap for building sustainable, resilient Global surgical systems⁶. The modern version of Global Surgery became the multidisciplinary field which works towards equitable surgical care globally and involves need (funding, public health and policy), access (cost and capacity), quality (safety and effectiveness), research (academic support for filling the knowledge gaps), advocacy (to develop public support) and education (training and capacity building)¹. A large number of non-governmental organisations support the global effort to improve surgical services by helping with providing services, collaboration, training and essential equipment. Global Surgery means different

things to different people but to put it simply it is a team game - and in this ecosystem everyone contributes their bit and brings something to the table.

Another remarkable fact is that the attraction of Global Surgery among the medical students and trainees has skyrocketed because the principle of *Noblesse oblige* (desire to help those who are less privileged) is a very strong motivation. Currently significant effort is directed towards academic global surgery programmes in HIC institutions and HIC surgical trainee placements in LMICs⁷. Moreover, motivated students and trainees have formed networks of future global surgery providers in the US (Global Surgery Student Alliance, GSSA) as well as all over the world (International Student Surgical Network, InciSioN). These networks provide inspirational leadership for advocacy, education, and research towards the future of Global Surgery.

The discipline of Global Surgery is now well established with all the stakeholders staunchly supporting it. A recent attention on '*decolonising*' it can only strengthen it, like a rite of passage, a coming of age. Future research must focus on gathering stronger data on quantifying its need, access and quality.

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