

Editorial

Postgraduate Orthopaedic Training 1981-2010: Thirty Years of The Masters Programme in Malaysia

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The Master of Orthopaedics programme was introduced in 1981 to enable Malaysian orthopaedic surgeons to be trained and certified in a structured four-year training programme. Thirty years have passed. It is now time to reflect on the progress achieved and the challenges ahead.

From 1981 to 2003, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), University of Malaya (UM) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) conducted their training programmes independently and had separate examinations. This led to the perception that the standards of training and assessment differed between the three universities. The establishment of a national board of orthopaedics was needed to ensure uniformity and the highest quality of postgraduate training. The Conjoint Board of Orthopaedics was formed in 2003 to oversee orthopaedic training and examinations. Board members consist of senior orthopaedic surgeons from the universities, Ministry of Health and the Academy of Medicine.

The first conjoint part two examination in orthopaedics was held in 2004. International external examiners were invited for global benchmarking. In the same year, the Ministry of Health started a three-year fellowship programme for all orthopaedic subspecialties in the major public hospitals. Training in public hospitals is now monitored by the postgraduate education committee of each hospital.

Four hundred and fifty orthopaedic surgeons have qualified from the three universities since 1981. Two hundred and eighteen from UKM, 146 from UM and 86 from USM. Thirty five (8%) are women.

The International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) became the fourth university to initiate an orthopaedic training programme with its first class of three trainees starting in 2008. Additionally, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) are in the midst of obtaining accreditation to begin their programmes.

The increase in the number of orthopaedic surgeons has led to a proportionate increase in the number of locally organised courses and workshops. A cursory glance at the

Malaysian Orthopaedic Association webpage shows that there is at least one course or workshop conducted every month.

The internationally recommended ratio of orthopaedic surgeons to the population is 1: 25,000. With around 550 orthopaedic surgeons in Malaysia, the present ratio is approximately 1: 50,000. Thus, Malaysia needs to double the number of orthopaedic surgeons to achieve the ideal ratio for its current population.

In recognition of the quality of orthopaedic training, international trainees from 13 countries have now enrolled in the programme. These include Brunei, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Timor Leste and Yemen.

Each university has its own criteria in selecting trainees for admission. The Basic Science Examination in Orthopaedics organised by the College of Surgeons and the Conjoint Board of Orthopaedics was initiated in 2010 to ensure that the best trainees are selected. A passing grade in the examination will soon be made a prerequisite for the admission interviews.

The larger number of trainees and funding has resulted in higher quality research and publications. This is evident in the submissions for the annual Mahmood Merican Award for the best research presentation by an orthopaedic trainee. Papers shortlisted for presentation are almost invariably in the realm of basic science research.

The end point of research is publication. The Malaysian Orthopaedic Journal started publication in 2007 with the aim of encouraging and publishing locally authored research articles. It is an open access online journal and is indexed in several databases. Currently, the Journal receives manuscripts from around the world and several published articles have been cited.

What are the challenges ahead?

Orthopaedic surgery remains a popular specialty. Every year, more than 100 doctors apply for the training programme and

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only 40 to 50 trainees are accepted. More trainers and training centres are needed to cater to this increasing trend. Orthopaedic surgeons are required as mentors to encourage and support the teaching and learning mission. Frequent discussions, regular conferences and a willingness to listen to feedback from junior staff will provide a more conducive learning environment.

The part two examinations are a professional exit examination. To befit its status, a change in the name from Master of Orthopaedics to Doctor of Orthopaedics has been proposed. This will avoid the confusion that frequently arises when comparing a clinical master's degree to a non-clinical master's degree.

Our duty is to continue training the next generation of orthopaedic surgeons. This will be our legacy.

