Women in Surgery – South East Asia

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• South East Asia comprises 11 countries, majority are low and middle income
### Countries in SE Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Physician per 1000 population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>HI</td>
<td>405 512</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>14 832 255</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>LMI</td>
<td>248 037 853</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>LMI</td>
<td>6 473 050</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>UMI</td>
<td>29 021 940</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>52 543 841</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>LMI</td>
<td>96 017 322</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>HI</td>
<td>5 312 400</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>UMI</td>
<td>67 164 130</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>LMI</td>
<td>1 148 958</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>LMI</td>
<td>88 772 900</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>609 730 161</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For comparison, physician per 1000 in USA is 2.5
Global distribution of surgeons, anaesthesiologists and obstetricians

What is meant by “surgeon”

- Surgeon is a rather generic term
- It can apply to ENT surgeon, Ophthalmologist, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, orthopaedic surgery, general surgery (and its subspecialties like breast surgery, hepatobiliary surgery), urologist, cardiothoracic surgeon, paediatric surgeon, plastic surgeon, neurosurgeon
- For this discussion, women surgeon refers to all surgeons except ENT, Ophthalmology and Obstetrics and Gynaecology
- In Malaysia, majority of Obstetrics and Gynaecology are women because of cultural and religious issues
A quick survey on the percentage of surgeons in SE Asia who are women.....

**Thailand** – 50% of surgeons who are under 40 years old are women

**Malaysia** – 10% of surgeons are women, 20% of surgical trainees are women, 60% of medical students are women

**Singapore** – 14% of consultant general surgeons are women, 37% of surgical residents are women, and 50% of medical students are women

**Indonesia** – 3.5% of surgeons are women

**Myanmar** – 15% of surgeons are women and 66% of medical students are women
Role of women in SE Asia

• In South-East Asia, most of the societies are predominantly patriarchal. The customary thought of people is that “girls are born to be fed throughout their lives” and “boys are born to earn and support the whole family”.

• Traditional gender roles dominate the region. Women take on the role of child bearing, while men are the breadwinners.

• The cultural norms prevailing in South-East Asia perpetuate the subordinate position of women socially and economically.

• In some urban regions of South-Asian countries, women’s social roles have changed to some extent. They have now comparatively more opportunities for education, employment and enjoyment of civil rights within society. However, the de-stereotyping of the gender roles which have been traditionally assigned by our society is still far away.
Stereotyping of the type of surgery a women should do

- Cardiothoracic surgery, Neurosurgery, Urology are “manly” specialties
- Women more likely to do plastic surgery and paediatrics surgery
- In General surgery, women more likely to do breast surgery (In Malaysia, majority of breast surgeons are women)
- As well as gender stereotyping within the medial profession, there is also stereotyping among the public
Barriers to women taking up surgery as a career

• Work-Life Balance
• Sexual harassment and bullying
• Gender discrimination
• A lot of discouragement from friends and relatives
Encouraging more women in surgery

• It is critical that we address the reasons why very few go on to a career in surgery, whether it's work-life balance issues, gender discrimination, bullying etc. if we are to ensure adequate surgical services for the nation in the future.

• There are no legal barriers to women doing surgery as a career; the barriers are mainly at the individual level
Measures to encourage women in surgery

• Workshops for female medical students and young doctors on a career in surgery

• Possibility of “shared posts” for women with young children

• Sensitise male colleagues to treat women surgical trainees with respect – cut down on sexual harassment and bullying

• Successful women surgeons as role models and mentors
Moving forward....

• There are more women than men in medical schools, hence the ratio of women to men in surgery should reflect this

• Hence there is a need to de-stereotype surgeons as being male among the public as well as in the medical fraternity

• While Asia is still very much a male-dominated society, there are indications that more women are moving into positions of influence; however more needs to be done to achieve gender equity in Asia