

Development of the Basic Surgical Skills Course in the West Indies

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It is said that 'Education is What Survives When What Has Been Learnt Has Been Forgotten'. The Intercollegiate Basic Surgical Skills (BSS) Course was established in the UK in 1994, initially by a group of surgeons led by Bill Thomas FRCS who wrote and designed a syllabus of essential skills that any surgeon in training should have. It has since evolved to become part of the basic surgical training in the UK (1, 2).

The genesis of the BSS Workshop in the West Indies occurred on June 6th, 2012, with a visiting contingent from the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCSEng), who was attending the 10th Anniversary of the Caribbean College of Surgeons hosted at the Grafton Beach Resort, Tobago. This was first conducted as a workshop in conjunction with the Department of Clinical Surgical Sciences (DCSS) at the Anatomy Lab in the University of the West Indies' Trinidad Campus. The aim of the workshop led by Bill Thomas and Professor Mike Parker was to introduce the *concept* of formal and standardized surgical training (3) in the Caribbean region. They were accompanied by two research fellows, James Ansell and Akan Emin, as well as the Head of Research RCSEng, Mr. Martyn Coomer. The course was tailored to encompass basic surgical techniques including knot-tying, wound closure, tendon repair and bowel anastomosis in a one-day course with 25 trainee candidates with local Faculty support from Professors Jimmy Ramdass and Vijay Naraynsingh. This process was developed into a two-day traditional-type course over the following years, January 2013 and 2014, with the support of Professor Parker who was instrumental in the next crucial step of achieving official and certified course status from the RCSEng. The prerequisite requirements from the RCSEng were fulfilled in 2013 with: (a) the purchase of basic surgical instruments and jigs to run the course (grant of US\$5000 donated by AA Laquis Trinidad Ltd) (4); (b) identification of

an appropriate location at the Anatomy Lab at FMS, St. Augustine; (c) arrangements to receive loaner training laparoscopic equipment via Karl Storz Endoskope, Germany (5), which was directly arranged by Mrs. Sybill Storz the owner of the company (a partner in the delivery of the course programme who loves to assist countries such as Trinidad); and (d) provision of strong and reliable administrative support provided by Miss Melrose Yearwood, a senior research Technician at the DCSS. The course received strong support from the incumbent Dean, FMS St. Augustine, Professor Samuel Ramsewak, with regard to funding the effort in advance with the promise of regaining the expenses. With these arrangements in place, the course franchise from the Royal College of Surgeons of England, was granted to the St. Augustine campus in 2015 and an agreement, between the RCSEng Education Department and The UWI, was signed by the Principal Professor Clement Sankat, making the St. Augustine Campus the first recognized International Centre of the RCSEng in the Western Hemisphere. This has been documented in the *Annals (Bulletin) of the Royal College of Surgeons of England* in 2013 (6), *STAN Magazine* in July–September 2015 (7), *MeduLink* (8) and *International Journal of Surgery* 2019 (9). Since starting the BSS, over 200 candidates have been trained with Professor Ramdass leading as Course Director since 2012 to date. More than 15 of our local surgeons have become faculty on the Course and are formally trained to run this course independently, on behalf of the RCSEng. The course is run over two days consisting of handling surgical instruments, theatre safety, bowel anastomosis, tendon repair, vascular anastomosis, and basic laparoscopic techniques including the manipulation of instruments in a three-dimensional surgical environment while viewing a remote two-dimensional image and to practise visuospatial awareness involved

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in depth-cueing and the 'fulcrum' effect of instrument manipulation.

Success has been sweet with the constant and sustained profit for the DCSS, FMS, St. Augustine since 2015.

Other institutions now franchised internationally to engage surgical trainees in the BSS course are the Kimi Academy, Egypt, University Hospital of Larissa, Greece, Symbiosis Centre for Health Skills, India, Oslo University Hospital, St. Olavs Hospital and University Hospital of North Norway, Royal Medical Services Amman Jordan, King Fahad Medical City, Saudi Arabia, Faculty of Medicine University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka and the College of Medicine & Health Sciences, University of Sharjah, UAE (10). This has been a major achievement for the DCSS, FMS, UWI and should not be taken lightly. Further to all these developments additional courses of the RCSEng were introduced including Student Surgical Skills, Training the Trainers and How to Write a Surgical Research Paper. This was achieved, with the support of Eric Drabble, FRCS and Jyoti Shah FRCS of the RCS Education and Training Department.

Other courses were developed locally including Intermediate Laparoscopic Skills, a Head & Neck Endosinus Surgery Workshop, and a Gynaecology Laparoscopic Workshop in 2015. We are now in the process of purchasing our own Laparoscopic Endotrainers in order to avoid shipping costs from Karl Storz Endoscopic Loaner Equipment. Additionally, provisions have now also been made to accommodate trainees from other Caribbean countries, and students now come from Jamaica, Bahamas, Barbados, and Guyana. The courses are now oversubscribed, and plans are in place to run courses biannually to accommodate all applicants.

The benefits of introducing and developing courses such as this example is far reaching and at the least grossly underestimated to say the least. In my case, it created significant links with prominent institutions internationally as I have been invited annually to run these courses in the UK, I have made many good friends, we have developed a relationship with the RCSEng faculty members who now have a connection to the Caribbean and UWI and it has encouraged the development of trainees in the DM (Surgery) programme in Trinidad and has been integrated into the DM (Surgery)

programme in Trinidad (having the BSS adds to a candidates score for entering the DM) and recently Cardiff University School of Medicine and Welsh Institute of Minimally Access Therapy donated laparoscopic instruments through Mr. Neil Warren in 2019.

In conclusion, there were many teething problems in initiating the course such as acquiring the necessary finances, convincing those in authority of success, to arrange accommodation for visiting students, to ship and clear loaner laparoscopic equipment from Germany in time for the course, ensuring financial sustainability and acquiring and maintaining the Franchise. The success of the course is reflected in it being oversubscribed locally and regionally and is an exhibition of the strength, brilliance, and ability to form durable international collaborations at the University of the West Indies.

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