

Breast Surgery International Outreach Programmes

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women world-wide. Incidence rates in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are lower than in high income countries; however the rates are increasing very rapidly in LMICs due to social changes that increase the risk of breast cancer. Breast cancer mortality rates in LMICs remain high due to late presentation and inadequate access to optimal care. Optimal management of breast cancer requires a multidisciplinary team, which is often lacking in LMICs. Oncology treatment, ie radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and targeted therapy requires more resources than surgery and are even more lacking in low resource settings. In such settings, surgical treatment is often the only modality of treatment available, and modified radical mastectomy is the most common operation performed. However, if breast cancer is detected early, a modified radical mastectomy alone can give good outcomes. Surgeons should be trained in the correct techniques of breast surgery, and it has been shown that inadequately performed mastectomies result in poor outcomes. Surgeons also need to take the lead in promoting early detection and screening. Public education on breast awareness is vital and the message that early detection can save lives need to be communicated to the public. Surgery will only be for palliation if a woman present with metastatic breast cancer. There is an urgent need to close the cancer divide between rich and poor countries and to prevent breast cancer deaths with early detection and optimal access to treatment.

To improve breast cancer outcomes in LMICs, Breast Surgery International aims to develop quality breast cancer care through conducting workshops and course aimed at general and breast surgeons in these countries. Such workshop will cover basic surgical techniques as well as advanced techniques in oncoplastic breast surgery.

In May 2012, BSI, together with IAES, signed a memorandum of understanding with the College of Surgeons, Academy of Medicine Malaysia, to hold five workshops in different parts of Malaysia. So far three workshops have been held, in August 2012, August 2013, and August 2014. The fourth Breast and Endocrine Surgery Workshop will be in August 2016.

Besides Malaysia, BSI also has conducted 2 workshops in Lucknow, in 2014 and Feb 2016, and a workshop in Istanbul Turkey in November 2014.

All these workshops have been well attended. Three more workshops will be held in 2016 – that is, Hue Vietnam in Jun 2016, Kota Baru Malaysia in August 2016 and Mombasa Kenya in Dec 2016. Two more workshops in Hong Kong in Sep 2016 and Istanbul Turkey in Nov 2016 will be funded by the host country.

However running such workshops require funding, as BSI pays for the travel of the lecturers, while the host country typically will cover the local transfers and accommodation. Generally 2 or 3 lecturers from BSI will run each workshop. In really low resource settings, BSI is prepared to pay local costs as well for its lecturers. Currently BSI has no more funds for these workshops after 2016. It hopes to partner with ISS Foundation in raising funds to continue workshops, especially in Asia and Africa.