

## The International Association of Student Surgical Societies: A brief history from 2014-2017

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### Introduction

The International Association of Student Surgical Societies (IASSS) was founded in 2011 to link up student surgical societies from around the world. These Societies have been formed by students with an aim to promote interest in surgical education and research amongst undergraduate medical students. Their formation has been fostered by the recent realization that adequate surgical care is a neglected component of global public health.<sup>1</sup>

The insufficient number of trained surgeons is one of the many barriers to meeting global surgical needs, especially in middle- and low-income countries. This barrier is one the IASSS aims to address.<sup>2,3</sup> Since its inauguration, the IASSS has been active in creating opportunities for undergraduate medical students across the world to explore the full spectrum of surgery.

### International Meetings

Table 1 shows the successful symposia the IASSS has held annually from 2014 to 2016, and it will host another in 2017. These events provide students with valuable training

in surgical fundamentals and networking opportunities. The bringing together of prospective surgeons from a variety of cultural backgrounds and educational training provides an opportunity for students to play an active role in improving their training in line with global standards and with an awareness of global needs.

The membership base of the IASSS has increased over the last three years. The IASSS has 30 member societies across 25 countries, spanning six continents (Figure 1).

Through the mentorship of the first patrons of the IASSS, Professor Delawir Kahn of the University of Cape Town and Professor Georges Azzie of the University of Toronto, the society aimed to foster interest in surgical care amongst undergraduate students from different countries and cultures. This would be achieved by promoting interaction between students of developing and developed nations. This could start to address: inequitable access to surgical care, support of student surgical opportunities in developing countries, socioeconomic status as a barrier to academic excellence, and finally, a better understanding of both local and global surgical needs. The IASSS has expanded its core objectives as it has grown (Table 2).<sup>4</sup>

### Committee Structure

The IASSS consists of three divisions: a General Assembly which includes the patrons and honorary members of the IASSS, a coordinating elected Executive Committee, and the Chapters representing all the major geographical regions of the world.

### Affiliations and Partnerships

In 2017, the IASSS affiliated with the International Society of Surgery/Société Internationale De Chirurgie (ISS/SIC).

Figure 1: Countries with IASSS Member Societies



**Table 1. IASSS Symposia 2014-2017**

Year	Host University	Location	Theme	Number of delegates
2014	University of Cape Town	Cape Town, South Africa	‘Pioneering in surgery’	116
2015	University of Queensland	Brisbane, Australia	‘Inspiration, Innovation, Action’	400
2016	University of Namibia	Windhoek, Namibia	‘Back to Basics’	90
2017	University of Bucharest	Bucharest, Romania	‘Overcoming Barriers’	pending

**Table 2. Core Objectives of the IASSS**

1. Create a sustainable network that will promote the exchange of ideas and the pooling of resources between member student surgical societies.
2. Foster mutually beneficial and equitable connections and exchanges between surgical societies across the globe.
3. Create a thoughtful global platform for surgical electives.
4. Provide support for scholarly student-driven projects (clinical, research, education, advocacy) that may result in better patient care and solutions to global surgical issues.
5. Foster a better understanding of local and global issues impacting medical students with an interest in surgical specialties and create a sense of global fellowship.
6. Provide assistance to aspiring student surgical societies across the globe.

The ISS/SIC was founded in 1902 and is one of the oldest international surgical societies. The founding principle of the ISS, which echoes that of the IASSS, is the belief that the development of surgery throughout the world should be independent of politics and that science has no boundaries. The ISS/SIC envisioned the coming together of international surgeons as an opportunity to further research and ensure that the standard of clinical surgery is maintained at the highest level. The affiliation between the IASSS and the ISS/SIC provides students with both mentorship opportunities and exposure to current surgical knowledge and skills training. This collaboration has seen Professor Andrew Hill, incoming president of the ISS/SIC, and Dr Tina Gaarder accept the positions of IASSS patrons in 2017 to help guide the next generation of surgical pioneers. The IASSS supports the concept of “global surgery” and Dr John Meara, author of the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery<sup>5</sup> is also a patron of the society.

The IASSS has linked with InciSiON - the International Student Surgical Network - a global network of medical students, residents and young doctors advocating education in and performing research in global surgery. It has also affiliated with regional student surgical bodies: the Southern African Students’ Surgical Society (SASSS) and the Australasian Students’ Surgical Association (ASSA).

The IASSS has partnered with two international companies to improve the educational resources offered to members. CSurgeries<sup>6</sup> offers online peer-reviewed medical videos for

students and professionals across all surgical disciplines and Kenhub<sup>7</sup> is a producer of online anatomy study resources that include video tutorials, anatomy quizzes, articles and an online interactive anatomy atlas.

## Future Directions

In addition to driving its core objectives, the IASSS is establishing an elective programme to facilitate students travelling to other countries in order to gain surgical exposure and teaching from different perspectives.

The organising of international symposia has proven challenging for undergraduate medical students. From 2014 to 2017, committee members of the IASSS have managed these tasks in their spare time. The recent increased global interest in surgical education has meant that the size of these symposia has grown exponentially. Therefore, in 2018, the IASSS will be hosting regional conferences and in 2019 members will attend the ISS/SIC World Congress of Surgery.

The IASSS has gone from strength to strength since its beginnings in Southern Africa. Now an affiliate of the ISS/SIC, it is in a position to play an active role in international surgical education and training as well as provide global collaboration with the aim of nurturing future surgeons. This is especially important given the unmet and growing surgical needs of the world.

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