



## Myanmar medical specialists pass WITH FLYING COLOURS

The first cohort of Myanmar medical specialists selected for training in Myanmar Emergency Medicine Development Program (MEMDP) has successfully passed the University of Medicine (1), Yangon's Diploma in EM (October 2013) through the extraordinary efforts of volunteer FACEMs (Fellows of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine) working as part of an international collaboration

WITH KAREN MURPHY

Since the Myanmar Emergency Medicine Development Program (MEMDP) was established in January 2012, more than 80 international clinicians including Emergency Physicians, Surgeons and Anaesthetists from Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand have volunteered the equivalent of around 1500 man-days to train the candidates and help develop the program.

This international effort to assist in the building of an EM Service (EMS) in Myanmar has been estimated to equate to a financial contribution of more than \$US4 million in voluntary work days and self-funded accommodation and travel costs in the first 18 months. Such dedicated focus and commitment has proved so successful, that all 18 specialists selected for training passed the Diploma Exam and graduated in March 2014.

With no specialist EMS in Myanmar up to now, the country is in the process of establishing dedicated EM departments at the Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyitaw General Hospitals. A second cohort of specialists commenced the Diploma program in February 2014. As with the first cohort, all candidates are qualified medical specialists (surgeon, anaesthetists, paediatricians or physicians).

Described by the Ministry of Health in Myanmar as an important first step for the establishment of EMS, the Diploma course grew out of collaboration between the Myanmar Ministry of Health, the Myanmar Medical Association, the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM), the International Federation for Emergency Medicine (IFEM) and RACS.

Under the joint leadership of Dr James Kong FRACS and Dr Georgina Phillips FACEM, the MEMDP provided candidates with:

- An introductory course in EM;
- Clinical rotations in the core EM specialties of anaesthetics, paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, general and orthopaedic surgery and internal medicine;
- Elective attachments at the Yangon General's Emergency Receiving Centre under the supervision of volunteer international FACEMs (Georgina Phillips, Chris Curry, Michael Augello, Shona McIntyre, Antony Chenhall and Rose Klein);
- A series of international skills training and instructor (train the trainer) courses, such as the ATLS, APLS and ELS courses (see table);
- International observation study visits to Hong Kong and Thailand to allow candidates to familiarise with the workings of mature modern EMS

and network with the international community;

- A two-part written and oral Diploma examination in EM.

The development of a syllabus and curriculum for a local Master of Medical Science (EM) course is now being led by an international volunteer (Rose Klein FACEM) and is planned to be delivered at UM(1), Yangon from 2015.

Dr James Kong FRACS, who was born in Myanmar and now works in Hong Kong, travels to the country regularly, several trips each month during the past three years to coordinate the program. He said that although leading the program had been "hard graft", he has been astounded by the support offered to the program by medical colleagues from around the region and the close collaboration and support that the Minister for Health (His Excellency Professor U Pe Thet Khin) and local Myanmar colleagues (Professor Zaw Wai Soe, Myint Thuang and Kyaw Myint Naing) have given.

"When I first suggested this to the Minister in December 2011, I expected working parties and committees to be formed, reports to be written and time lines proposed. However, the fact that an agreement was signed within a few months and the first diploma program initiated and completed within 15 months is incredible," he said. ▶



ABOVE: The 18 Diploma Graduates. Left: Dr Rose Klein (left), Dr Chris Curry (second from left) with Dr Aye Thiri Naing in the foreground – she is one of the new Diploma candidates who commenced the EM PGD in 2014. In the background, centre is Dr Naing Win Aung (one of the 2013 graduates).



“I am both amused and amazed that we have achieved this in such a short time and sometimes when I am stressed out flying back and forth more than a few times each month, I think I should have kept my mouth shut.

“This achievement would not have happened without the cooperation and support that the program has received from colleagues from various countries and the support has been way beyond what I expected. They deserve my heartfelt thank you for giving up so much of their valuable time.”

Mr Kong said that the genesis of the MEMDP had been sparked by the crisis following Cyclone Nargis (May 2008). In the aftermath medical colleagues from the region came to the politically isolated country to offer assistance and support for capacity building at an invitation by the Myanmar Medical Association. RACS funded the inaugural Primary Trauma Care program and supported the train the trainers concept. This early and sustained connection has given the

College a high level of credibility within the Myanmar medical community and this collaboration will continue as the local medical specialist communities seek international assistance to enhance their future development.

“Modern medical education in Myanmar started under the British Colonial days of the late 1800s and a medical school was established in Yangon before Singapore or Hong Kong,” he said.

“However, the disruptions of 1962 and the consequent disconnect with the international community in 1975 meant that the local medical schools have been self-maintaining since. In the international community, the development of EM is a relatively recent event and Myanmar, because of its closed nature of the past five decades missed out on this process of development.

“The aim of all the Colleges involved in MEMDP has never been one of providing aid, but assisting in capacity building. We have been working alongside our Myanmar colleagues to help build their capacity so that they can develop and establish EM as a specialty and they are able to design EMS tailored to the local needs that will improve the quality of care delivered to injured in Myanmar.

“It will take time, but the extraordinary achievements of the past 15 months give everyone involved in this work some confidence that it will happen!”

Mr Kong said that given more than half the costs of the program had been borne by the volunteer specialists themselves, more consideration needed to be given into how the on-going program should be funded to ensure that the next steps are sustainable. A comprehensive, cooperative evaluation of what has been undertaken so far is planned for early this year.

“While the MEMDP has been a great success, the ongoing program needs a formal budget commitment by the Myanmar Government if it is to continue to achieve the best outcomes and avoid the risk of draining the enthusiasm of all the generous volunteer specialists who have given so much of their time and expertise,” he said.

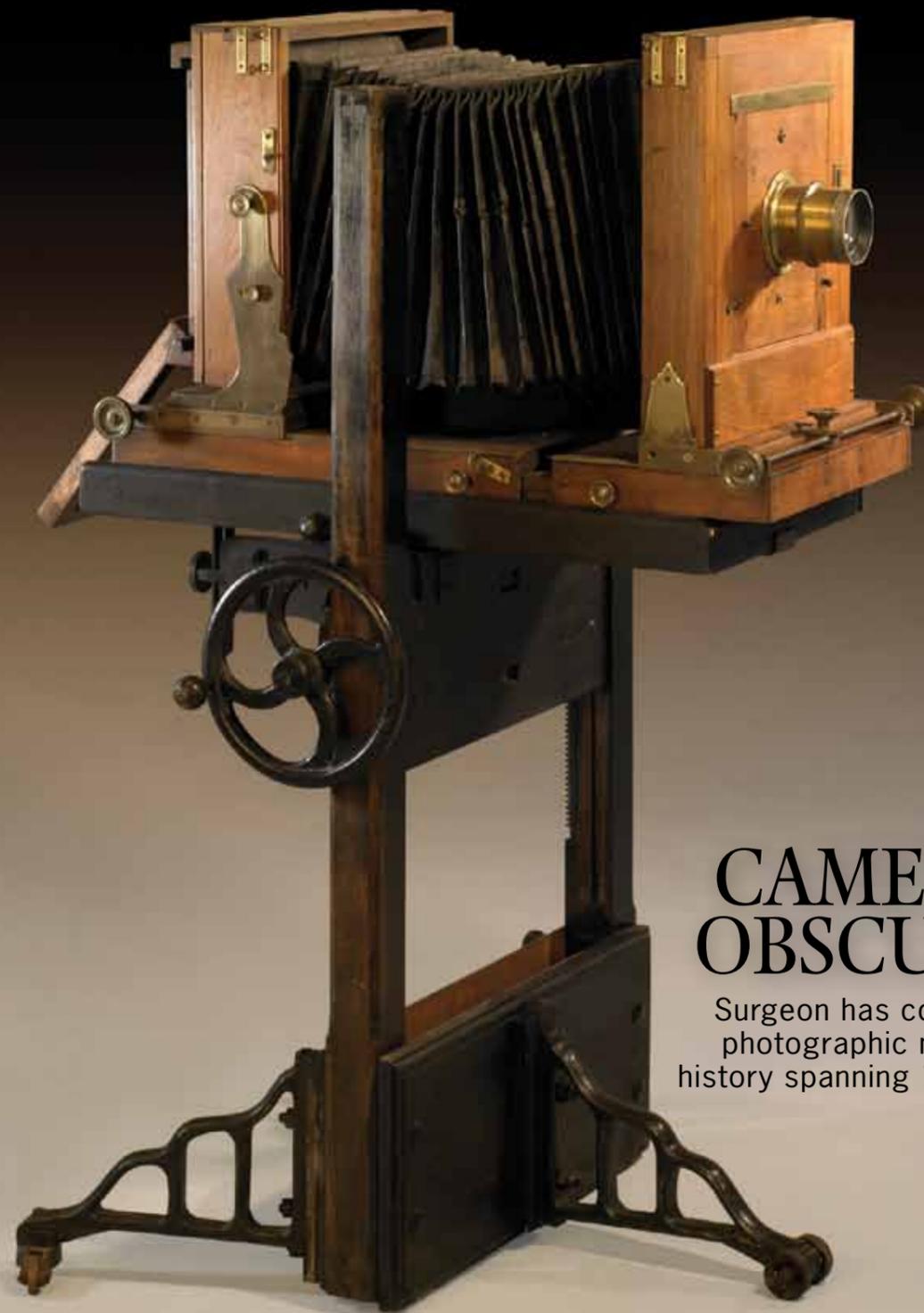
“I congratulate all the successful Myanmar specialists who passed their exams last year for their willingness to put aside their former specialties to take up a new medical career, but I particularly thank the Fellows of the RACS and the ACEM.”

Mr Kong said other than the volunteers, he particularly wished also to thank the College for the support provided to the program and to his RACS colleagues who had travelled to Myanmar in support, including Mr Phil Truskett, Mr Richard Perry, Ms Christine Castle, Mr Max Esser and also to Michael Hollands and David Watters for their inveterate support, guidance and leadership.

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## CAMERA OBSCURA

Surgeon has collected  
photographic military  
history spanning 130 years