

# Surgery: The Neglected Stepchild of Global Health

RACS releases its new Global Health Strategic Plan 2017-2021, *Surgical News* features some important projects happening in our region



**MS ANNETTE HOLIAN**  
Chair, External Affairs

On a Monday morning a few months ago, surgeons strided around a striated carpet, reaching for coffees, handshakes with old friends, and tethered black chairs, to come together and partake in the RACS Annual Scientific Congress Global Health Symposium, convened by Assoc. Prof. Suren Krishnan, FRACS. Darting around like a morning city pushbike courier, and eventually ending up behind the lectern, a rather young man began his presentation, “Surgery: The Neglected Stepchild of Global Health”.

With eyes peering out through that gap that exists between the brow and the frame of one’s glasses, Professor Mark Shrime, an ENT Surgeon from Harvard Medical School’s Program in Global Surgery and Social Change began his keynote lecture on how surgery has unfortunately, and often, been left out of Global Health. Echoed throughout the symposium in presentations by RACS Fellows, the key message was understood, 5 billion people around the world do not have access to safe, affordable, and timely surgery.

Such a message slowly begins to permeate to policy makers and donors, coupled with astounding figures like the global burden of surgical disease exceeds that of HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis combined; and global health

actors are becoming increasingly aware that global health is global surgery, and Fellows of RACS are leading the way. As the newly-elected Chair of External Affairs, I attended the 70th World Health Assembly of the WHO in Geneva, bringing the maxim from the Asia-Pacific that surgery can be affordable and accessible, and is intrinsic to Global Health, and that our region is pioneering the collection of national surgical metrics in order to inform national health plans.

This year, RACS releases its new Global Health Strategic Plan 2017-2021 with a vision that safe surgical and anaesthetic care is available and accessible to everyone. Since the early 1990’s, RACS has been working across the Asia-Pacific, witnessing a shift from charitable service delivery to partnership with Ministries of Health and universities in surgical education, training, workforce development, and clinical governance. Under the new strategic plan, RACS Global Health activities work towards three strategic objectives: (i) surgical and

anaesthesia care is included in national health plans, (ii) workforce development is supported by training and continuing professional development activities, and (iii) strong partnerships are forged with international surgical bodies and partners across the Asia-Pacific.

At the global level, RACS activities align with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Number 3 to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. At the national level, RACS collaborates with in-country governments and partners to develop sustainable health systems and processes for our primary stakeholders – the local communities, to access safe and affordable surgical care.

In this issue of *Surgical News*, I welcome you to #RACSGlobalHealth and invite you to read stories from our colleagues and counterparts in Australia, New Zealand, and across the region, highlighting our work contributing towards a world where safe surgical and anaesthetic care is available and accessible to everyone. ▶



*5 billion people around the world do not have access to safe, affordable, and timely surgery.*

*Dr Mark Moore (left), Dr Joao Ximenes (right), Timor-Leste. Photographer is Ellen Smith.*