

ROAD TO HPB SURGERY

From the Perspective of the HPB Trainees

The Early Days



Professor Datuk M Balasegaram
Pioneer and Father of Liver Surgery in Malaysia

Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary (HPB) services in Malaysia has its roots since the early 1960's during the post-colonial era led by the world renowned Professor Datuk M Balasegaram, famous for his work on liver surgery.

During the early days, training in HPB surgery was through apprenticeship where the General Surgeon embarked on the field of HPB surgery having developed interest in it and gets oneself attached to a HPB mentor who will pass on the surgical skills in HPB surgery to oneself. The mentee will take every opportunity to learn from the mentor in every areas of HPB surgery in order to be well equipped to handle all surgically related HPB disorders.

Evolution of the Training Programme

However, as training in every surgical specialty and sub-specialty developed over the years and training becomes more structured and cohesive, training in HPB surgery has similarly evolved over the years as well. This has given birth to a formal structured national subspecialty training programme, which started in the year 2000. To date, more than 30 HPB surgeons have been produced to serve nationwide from this endeavour.

The core training centre was Hospital Selayang, the cradle of the HPB and Liver Transplant services of the nation, and eventually expanded to Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah, Alor Setar in 2001, and Hospital Umum Sarawak in 2017. In the meantime, in tandem with the expansion of the HPB training programme and services within the Ministry of Health, the university hospitals such as University Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC) and University Kebangsaan Malaysia Medical Centre (UKMMC) were also actively involved in providing training in HPB subspecialty to trainees who pursued this interest in becoming a HPB surgeons as well in order to meet the needs of such service in their respective institutions.

As we take the next step forward in HPB Subspecialty Training, we will see a more amalgamated and streamlined curriculum that will involve all parties and stakeholders in ensuring a national structured programme can be delivered to all HPB trainees in well recognized HPB institution throughout nationwide.

In this edition of the MyHPBS bulletin, we would like to hear from the current trainees on their thoughts and views, highlights in training, areas of interest and future direction in HPB surgery.



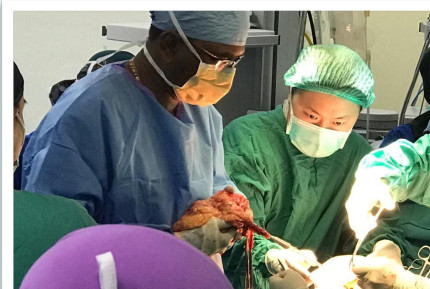
ERCP Services at Hospital Umum Sarawak

Musings from Our HPB Trainees

"As a general surgeon, I realised how inadequately prepared I was in handling complexities of hepatobiliary cases, which pushed me to pursue HPB surgery training in 2018. The initial phase of training was particularly tough considering the steep learning curves in most HPB procedures such as ERCPs. However, with high case volumes and guiding hands of senior consultants, the learning process was conducive. Rotating across all three training centres across Malaysia opened my eyes to how different levels of resources demand different ways of running HPB service. We as HPB surgeons should adapt our approach to different challenges."

Dr Sean Lim Choon Hean [Final year; Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah, Alor Setar]

"Each institution had its own special experience to offer. From district visits to interstate travelling for elective and emergency cases and to transplant. Working with different consultants and learning different approaches to the same problem was a priceless experience. An experience that will help me through my career as a HPB surgeon. All three places helped me to mould myself into becoming a better surgeon and hopefully a better leader. I hope the future trainees will enjoy it as much as I did."



Elective Surgery at Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah

Dr Padmaan Shankaran [Final Year; Hospital Melaka]

"I chose HPB surgery because I enjoy complex and challenging cases which are often beyond the reach of general surgeons. I had the opportunity to train in Hospital Selayang and Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah, Alor Setar which has greatly aided my growth and confidence in managing HPB cases. I have a great interest in laparoscopic surgery and intend to pursue specialised training in laparoscopic liver resection."

Dr Rajaie Bin Kamarudin [Final year; Hospital Selayang]

"Due to the vast geography of Sarawak and challenges in accessibility. I had the opportunity to travel and provide HPB services to the district hospitals. I had the chance to perform liver resection for a patient with a bleeding tumor. I have a special interest in Laparoscopic HPB surgery. I hope we have the opportunity to set up a wet lab to practice and sharpen our skills."

Dr Ong Guang Hong [2nd year; Hospital Selayang]

"My highlight in training was when a patient with liver failure who achieved recovery after a liver transplant. I admire the commitment of the liver transplant team in developing the unit in UMMC. There is a need to maximize exposure to complex cases to help fellows develop their skills, even if it requires an external rotation to centres that may perform these procedures. I have a keen interest in liver transplantation and intend to undergo an overseas fellowship training in 2022."

Dr Lee Yeong Sing [2nd Year; University Malaya Medical Centre]

"HPB has always been the field of surgical subspecialty that interest me. I started my training in Hospital Selayang, and some of the challenges I faced were managing complex HPB cases as well as liver transplant. It was a good experience learning different techniques and skills from the consultants. It was a very welcoming and exciting journey guided by good mentors as well as a healthy working relationship with other specialties such as Interventional Radiology, Gastroenterology and Hepatology."

Dr Jonathan Tan Khee Ghee [2nd year; Hospital Umum Sarawak]

“HPB surgery has a steep learning curve, demands technical expertise, and has a notorious risk of major complications, thus it is not an endeavour to be taken up by the occasional HPB surgeon. With this awareness, enrollment in a fellowship program is the only way forward. A large number of patients are still burdened with long commutes for hours to obtain treatment and appropriate follow-up care. It is my personal aim to be able to practice independently to serve where complex HPB surgeries are still not readily accessible to the public.”

Dr Dayang Azzayati [1st Year; Hospital Selayang]



Liver Transplant at Hospital Selayang

“Challenges I foresee in training are adapting from one training center to another, and balancing responsibilities for family, work and training. Most challenging case so far is a patient with pancreatic adenocarcinoma with portal vein involvement, requiring thrombectomy after Whipple’s procedure and a relaparotomy later. I find laparoscopic liver procedures is something to look forward to in the future, in tandem with the current training worldwide. I hope to have an overseas stint in either transplant or laparoscopic hepatobiliary centers in either Turkey or Thailand.”

Dr Syahrul Hadi bin Kamarulzaman [1st Year; Hospital Umum Sarawak]

Words of Wisdom



Mr Manisekar Subramaniam
National Head of HPB Surgery Services

MyHPBS Bulletin board members also had the opportunity to speak with **Mr Manisekar Subramaniam, National Head of HPB Surgery Services, Ministry of Health Malaysia**, on his thoughts on the evolution of the training programme over the next 10-15 years as well as pearls of wisdom for the trainees.

“More surgeons are showing interest in HPB Surgery. We may become a standalone speciality which in my opinion is not good for the country. We should remain in general surgery and provide 80% HPB work and 20% General Surgery. In the long run, we are planning to have resident HPB surgeons in all state hospitals.

I would encourage current trainees to pursue liver transplant as a niche area. Liver transplant work is going to flourish in the coming years, but all this will be possible only if HPB surgeons continue to stay in government service.

A word of advice for current and future trainees. The training structure involves adult learning. Aim for self improvement and learn new things always. Sacrifice for the betterment of patient care. Caring, empathy and ever willing to serve the poor and needy.”

It is always amazing to hear personal accounts and testaments shared by the trainees as each experience is unique. We thank all trainees for sharing with us and we wish you the very best in your training !!!

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