

MALAYSIAN SOCIETY OF COLORECTAL SURGEONS



THE JOURNEY THUS FAR

MEMOIRS OF THE MSCRS PRESIDENTS
2005-2025



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PREFACE

The Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons (MSCRS) was registered with the Registrar of Societies on 30th March 2005. This was following the formation of a special interest group of like-minded surgeons in 2003 with the objective of improving the quality of colorectal surgery in Malaysia.

Since its formation, the society has pursued its goals of promoting colorectal services, training and research through a multitude of activities, including scientific conferences, workshops, access to academic literature and postgraduate training funding, as well as advocating for colorectal surgeons. The society also maintains strong collaboration with other related societies such as enterostomal therapy nurses associations, ostomy societies and colorectal cancer survivor support groups.

Internationally, MSCRS maintains strong links with many Colorectal Surgery organizations like the Asia-Pacific Federation of Coloproctology (APFCP), ASEAN Society of Colorectal Surgeons (ASCS), American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS), Endoscopic and

Laparoscopic Society of Asia (ELSA), International Society of University Colon & Rectal Surgeons (ISCURS) and others. The society has also organized scientific events for ASCS and APFCP in conjunction with its own annual Coloproctology conferences.

Malaysian surgeons benefit from these activities as it allows them to develop and update their knowledge and skills in a cost-effective manner, while minimizing time away from work providing healthcare services to the Malaysian public. It allows local trainers to network with overseas trainers to establish training links, and local researchers can lay the groundwork for collaborative research.

As MSCRS celebrates 20 years of its existence this year, this collection of memoirs is timely and provides the past and current presidents of the society an avenue to provide their own perspectives on important events, offer insights into decision-making processes and also give some personal reflections and perceptions for future generations.



SAMUEL TAY KWAN SINN (2005-2007)



THE BEGINNINGS OF MALAYSIAN SOCIETY OF COLORECTAL SURGEONS

In the beginning, colorectal surgery was part of general surgery. In mid-1991, Professor Dr Freda Meah of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) sent me to the Glasgow Royal Infirmary under a British Council grant. My mentor there, Dr Ian G. Finlay (now Sir Ian Finlay), introduced me to the world of colorectal surgery. Upon my return, with the full support of UKM, the Colorectal Unit was formed in 1992. I worked tirelessly, promoting the subspeciality of colorectal surgery. I took every opportunity to accept speaking engagements in hospital meetings and public meetings in order to highlight colorectal surgery. Concurrently, I proceeded to perform more and more complex colorectal surgeries.

In 1995, I started private practice at the Subang Jaya Medical Centre (SJMC), Selangor. It was then that I faced fierce opposition from the general surgeons. I was the youngest surgeon there then. I was ostracised by them and one would not even return my greetings or have a handshake from my outstretched hand. I experienced public humiliation and embarrassment. I had been personally advised by SJMC Medical Advisory Board members to keep a low profile. Facing such opposition in private practice, I could no longer promote colorectal surgery in meetings. I persevered

by doing good colorectal surgery and producing good outcomes, in order to promote colorectal surgery without words.

In 1999, I offered the College of Surgeons of Malaysia to start a colorectal chapter with them. My offer was turned down. I was told that the College was not interested in developing colorectal surgery as a subspeciality. I remembered repeating my offer again to the subsequent President and again was given a cold shoulder. It was clear to me then that in order to start a colorectal surgery speciality grouping, it had to be started de novo, without help from more established groups.

In due course, more and more general surgeons began to be interested in colorectal surgery, and took up visiting fellowships to train at colorectal units overseas, in particular Singapore General Hospital.

In 2003, together with a group of like-minded surgeons, we held the First Colorectal Weekend in Melaka. The protagonist for this meeting was Dr Cheong Wai Kit, from Selayang Hospital, currently working at the Singapore General Hospital. The Second Colorectal Weekend was held the following year in Penang. After that, I was given the honour of being the Protem President of the colorectal group, and was tasked to form and formally register the Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons (MSCRS) with the Registrar of Societies. I took the constitution of the Malaysian Vascular Society as a template and formulated our own constitution. In order to name the society as 'Malaysian', the members must be from at least seven states in Malaysia. We, somehow, managed to fulfil that criterion and was formally registered in 2005 as a Society.

The first Annual General Meeting was held in 2005. I was graciously allowed to lead formally as the First (Founding) President of MSCRS. At the 2005 colorectal meeting, called 3rd Malaysian Colorectal Conference, we started to showcase international speakers, featuring the likes of Professor Dr Ian Finlay, Dr Goh Hak Su and Dr Charles Tsang. From that time, MSCRS has been holding annual scientific meetings until today. In the early years, credit must go to Professor

Charles Tsang who was instrumental in his advisory role. He has been generously helping out as part of the teaching faculty from the very beginning until this day.

After that 2005 scientific meeting, we started our forays into the international colorectal world. With the help of contacts, we managed to invite high profile speakers like Professor Dr Stanley Goldberg, Professor Dr Yoshihiro Moriya, Professor Dr Arun Rojanasakul, Professor Dr Ho-Kyung Chun, Professor Dr Woo Yong Lee, Professor Dr Fumio Konishi, Professor Steven Wexner and many more in order to offer high quality meetings to participants and establish Colorectal Surgery as a speciality in Malaysia. We made personal and close friends with other national colorectal societies around including the then called Asian Federation of Coloproctology (AFCP). Today AFCP has been renamed Asian Pacific Federation of Coloproctology (APFCP). Furthermore, MSCRS became a founding member of the ASEAN Society of Colorectal Surgeons (ASCS).

MSCRS was the centripetal force that held together the colorectal surgeons from the private practice, universities and the Ministry of Health. In this united collaboration, the Board of Colorectal Training was formed. Colorectal Training Fellowship was started in 2009. A comprehensive syllabus of three-year training was drawn up, mandating log books, written dissertation and overseas exposure.

The next milestone for MSCRS spin-off was the establishment of the National Specialist Register (NSR) in 2012, (fully enforceable in 2017) where colorectal surgery was formally recognised as a subspeciality.

After helming the speciality for two years and then the newly-formed Society for the next two years, the baton was passed on to Dr Akhtar Qureshi in 2007 who took MSCRS to greater heights.

When I formed the MSCRS, I had two objectives:

- (1) To get Colorectal Surgery recognised and established as a distinct subspeciality and
- (2) To maintain the standard of practice of Colorectal Surgery.

I am happy to see that the first objective had been achieved. The other objective would need ongoing work for years to come. It is my hope that MSCRS will take personal ownership of my second objective and achieve it in due course.

It is my sincere hope that the formula of united cooperation that birthed MSCRS and had resulted in the Society achieving significance in Malaysia will be continued to be used in all future exploits of MSCRS. I hope that all efforts can be made to maintain the unity of spirit amongst all the colorectal surgeons in Malaysia, whether in private practice, in universities or in the Ministry of Health. United we stand, Divided we fall.

As I conclude my thoughts on the Beginnings of MSCRS, I would like to acknowledge with sincere gratitude and thanks to all the founding members of MSCRS who were my comrades in arms and, without them, I could not have formed and established MSCRS.



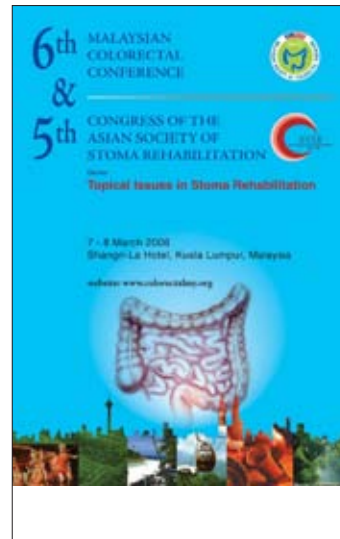
AKHTAR QURESHI (2007-2009)



In the bad old days, Colorectal Surgery was barely recognized as a subspeciality in Malaysia. There was a significant resistance to individuals calling themselves Colorectal Surgeons.

We started the first colorectal unit in Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia which was initially based at Hospital Lumpur and subsequently relocated to its current location.

Through this unit, multiple teaching sessions such as colorectal weekends, informal meetings and operating



visits to places like Alor Setar, Taiping, Ipoh, Seremban, Malacca and Kota Kinabalu helped spread the word.

Special arrangements to help postgraduate trainees to be placed in specialized units abroad further cemented the development of Colorectal Surgery in Malaysia.

To see where we have reached, there is no stopping MSCRS.

YUNUS GUL (2009-2011)



I became the third President of the Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons from 2009 to 2011.

It was a great privilege for me to have been given the opportunity to serve the Society. The two years passed by very quickly, but it was an overall exciting and rewarding experience for me personally. The challenges faced by the Society when it was initially formed had been expertly helmed by the two past presidents who had laid the foundations for a seamless progression in ensuring that the Society moved towards greater heights.

I had a few goals when I commenced my journey and the main objective was to elevate the status of the Society and expand our horizons to the international Colorectal surgical fraternities. This served as a stepping stone for our trainees to further their skills in well-renowned colorectal training centers around the globe. The emphasis on engaging our members also played an important part of our Society's priorities going forward.

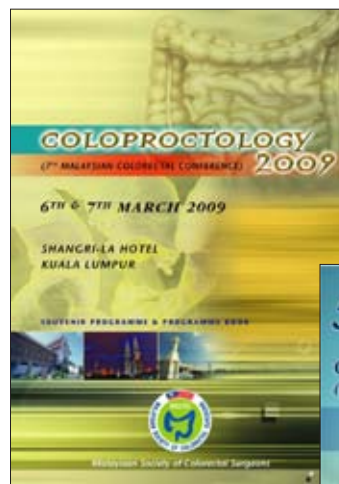
We have had to deal with a rapid succession of important events and situations. The continued strength of the Society with expanding membership captured the imagination of our ASEAN neighbours who had envied our Society and the well attended annual scientific meetings. We had the privilege of hosting the 5th ASEAN Society of Colorectal Surgeons Scientific Congress in conjunction with Coloproctology 2010 where we

continued to forge close ties with our neighbouring countries, which enhanced the Society's image.

We strengthened our relationship with our peers in the College of Surgeons and this was going to be a major influence on the specialty being recognised as a subspecialty over the coming years. We took great care in enforcing a stringent system of credentialing colorectal surgeons before the formal system was enforced which was to ensure optimal care with positive patient outcome.

True system improvement requires surgeons as leaders of the change and the maximum tenure of two years as a President was to ensure that the future leadership brought fresh ideas and energy to propel the Society to greater heights. We have been blessed with many more established and capable leaders who have collectively thrust the Society to even greater heights.

It was an honour to lead MSCRS and a joy to watch it grow over the years. This year's 20th Congress of the Asian Pacific Federation of Coloproctology should serve as a measure of MSCRS as a mature, efficient and well-led society.



WAN KHAMIZAR WAN KHAZIM (2011-2013)



I was elected as the fourth President of MSCRS in 2011 and held it until 2013. At that time, the Society was just about six years old with three preceding presidents; two of them were from the private sector and one from the university. As such, I also became the first and the only surgeon from the Ministry of Health Malaysia to hold this position until this memoir is published.

Before assuming the post of MSCRS president, I was the MOH head of colorectal services and chairman of the colorectal training committee since 2006. Throughout my career as a colorectal surgeon, my involvement in the training committee is the most satisfying one. It is solely responsible for increasing the number of colorectal surgeons in the country and, at the same time, has contributed immensely to the rise of membership of the Society.

In the years 1990s and early 2000, colorectal training was conducted by individual consultants in MOH and the universities. Trainees were sent overseas for colorectal attachment mainly in the UK and Singapore. The Selayang Hospital was chosen by MOH to be the first colorectal surgery service and training center after its inception in 2001. When the consultants there eventually resigned, there was a sudden gap left behind for training. The head of MOH surgical services at that

time, Dr Abdollah Salleh, then called for a meeting with all the remaining colorectal surgeons in service in MOH. There were three other surgeons who attended the meeting besides me. They were Dr Fitzerald Henry, Dr Jasiah Zakaria and Dr Paul Selvindoss. We were asked to form the training committee in accordance with the just-implemented three-year MOH fellowship training system. Being the most senior surgeon in the group, I was asked to head the training committee.

Together, we devised a training program for the MOH surgeons. Trainees were to work under two different consultant colorectal surgeons for two years and another one year at a recognized colorectal center overseas. Within three years, the trainees were required to complete their logbooks and present and publish two research papers. At the end of the training, they were assessed by the training committee in an exit interview. Once they pass, we would decide on their placement at state hospitals throughout the country.

To ensure that our training was all inclusive, we then invited our university colorectal consultants to join us. Obliging, Professor Dr Azmi Mohd Noor from International Islamic University Malaysia joined us followed by Professor Dr Ismail Sagap from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Professor Dr April Roslani from Universiti Malaya Medical Centre. At the same time, two past presidents, Dr Akhtar Qureshi and Dr Samuel Tay Kwan Sin joined as representatives from MSCRS. As a result, the MOH joint training committee became the sole colorectal surgery training board recognized by everyone in Malaysia.

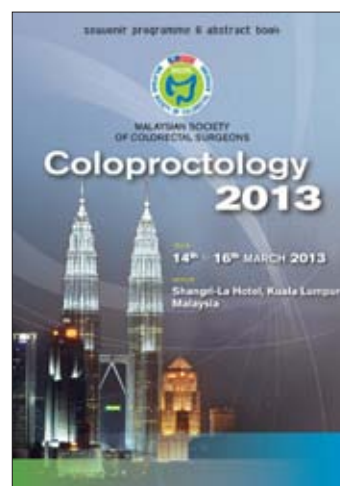
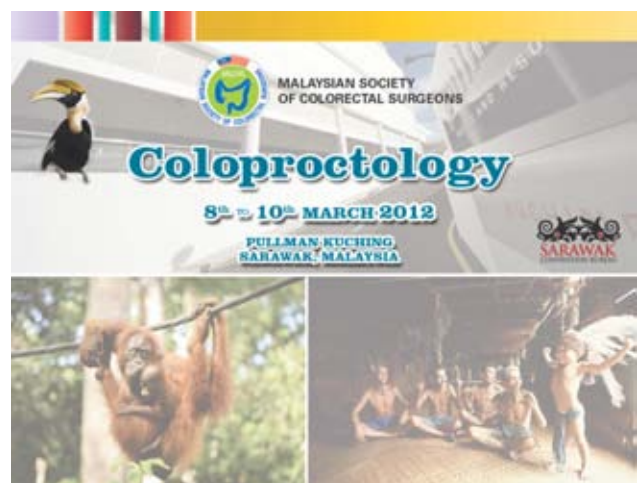
Consequently, our training program became very popular as we received one of the highest applications for subspecialty training every year. The applications were not only from MOH, but also from almost all the public universities in the country. We made it a point that all trainees should join MSCRS upon completion of training. Therefore, nearly all the new MSCRS members were our former trainees. From just about 20 of us at the time when the Society was initially formed, there are now almost 90 members. In fact, they are the ones running the Society right now.

In 2012, the Society received an offer from the Sarawak State Government to hold our annual Coloproctology Conference in Kuching. A grant of RM 80,000 came with the offer which was too good to decline. We have never held our conference away from the Peninsular Malaysia then. There was a challenge to find a suitable venue and get enough sponsorship with a reasonable number of participants. The bigger challenge was to hold the pre-congress surgical workshop there since we did not have a colorectal surgeon then in Sarawak. We found out that the Pullman Hotel Kuching was big enough to accommodate enough rooms for our participants together with a large hall for the main conference and a spacious area for booth set-up. The support from the medical companies turned out to be encouraging.

In order to conduct the pre-congress workshop, we needed a number of patients from the surgical department of Sarawak General Hospital (SGH). As the conference chairman, I decided to send one of our members to organize a monthly visit six months before the conference. He was to run a colorectal clinic there and help identify suitable colorectal cases for the workshop. On top of that, he was required to arrange the workshop at the SGH operation theatre. The audio-visual set-up was done with the help of a number of surgical product companies. Professor Dr Ismail Sagap, who has a very good rapport with SGH surgeons, took the challenge. We eventually managed to hold a reasonably successful workshop albeit some small audio hiccups. We are very grateful to the SGH surgical department for their assistance and cooperation in helping us to organize the successful conference. After the conference, the colorectal visits continued based on requests from the surgical HOD. We were delighted that our visits have been very much appreciated. What was proposed to be only a six-month visit turned out to be regular visits for about six years thereafter. Professor Dr Ismail Sagap continued the visits for about two more years. I then took over from him until we managed to place a resident colorectal surgeon at SGH.

On 9th August 2021, I became the first colorectal surgeon to retire from service with MOH. All the other

surgeons earlier left MOH to the private sector. Looking back, I am proud that by staying in government service, I have ensured that the training program ran very well producing a significant number of competent colorectal surgeons to serve the nation. I hope some of our MOH colorectal surgeons now stay long enough preferably until retirement to keep the training program running smoothly and perhaps even holding the post of MSCRS president one day while still serving under MOH.



LU PING YAN (2013-2015)



I had the honour of holding the post of President of MSCRS from 2013 to 2015.

As I remember it, the idea of setting up a Colorectal Society was conceived by Dr Charles Tsang and Dr Samuel Tay during the first Malaysia Colorectal Weekend in 2003. The initial aspirations were realized when MSCRS was formerly registered in 2005. The first President of the Society was Dr Samuel Tay.

By the time I was President, the Society was already in existence for eight years and was already well established, thanks to the excellent collaborative work of all the founding members with much help from members of the Society who included academic staff in the universities. During the fledgling years of the Society, Dr Charles Tsang provided much help and support, as advisor, mentor and as trainer.

MY ROLE AS PRESIDENT INVOLVED MAINLY THREE ASPECTS:

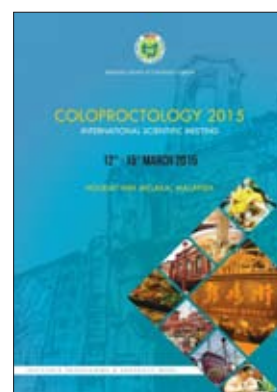
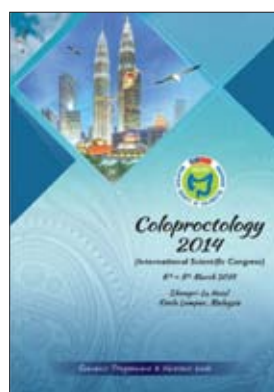
1. To increase the awareness and interest in Coloproctology among local surgeons with the long-term goal of improving the standards of colorectal surgery in this country
2. To establish links with colorectal surgeons of international repute from as many centers

worldwide as possible. The long-term goal of this was to establish communication channels with centers of colorectal surgery worldwide and, in so doing, develop avenues for high quality colorectal training open to local trainees.

3. To develop the scientific program for Coloproctology 2014 and 2015 in a manner which would allow the team to achieve both the objectives stated above.

I would like to think that I managed to pull off most of what I set out to do as President of the Society during my tenure. During my time as President, the expenses incurred exceeded the revenue generated for one Coloproctology conference. Among other things, the cost required to bring over distinguished colorectal speakers from abroad was high. However, in retrospect, I feel the value gained in terms of knowledge gained, establishing contacts with leading trainers of colorectal surgery in centers overseas, creating the awareness of MSCRS among international colorectal circles and, ultimately, forging pathways by which local trainees could receive colorectal training at good centers overseas were worth the expenditure incurred in monetary terms.

MSCRS has continued to evolve to become the success that it is today thanks to the splendid, ongoing efforts of subsequent office bearers and members of the Society.



SARKUNNATHAS MUTHUSAMY (2015-2017)



It was truly an honour to have been elected as the president of then fairly young and rapidly growing Society. Most of the activities that the Society undertook focused on training new and capable colorectal surgeons. These activities also enabled existing colorectal surgeons to update their knowledge and skills in this field.

Coloproctology 2016 was held in Kuala Lumpur, and Coloproctology 2017 was held in Penang. Both these conferences placed emphasis on the very basics to the more advanced and current trends in this field.

As a departure from the norm, a dry pelvic workshop replaced the usual live pre-congress workshop. This workshop exposed us to the horizons of the human pelvis that was usually difficult to understand.

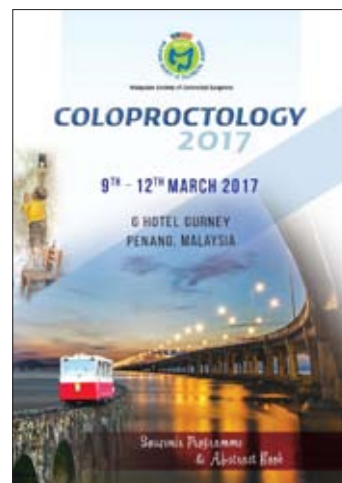
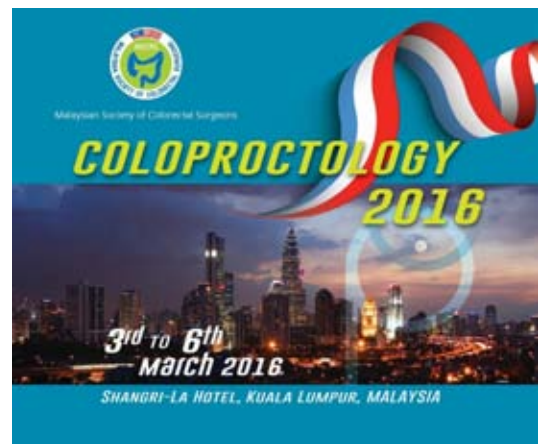
Another notable achievement during my term as the president is the signing of MOU between our Society and The Royal College of Surgeons of England, to allow our surgeons to enroll under the International Surgical Training Program. It was a two-year program which allowed our surgeons hands-on training in various aspects of advanced colorectal training such as pelvic exenteration, etc.

The Society also continuously supported the various training institutions in our country in producing well trained and competent colorectal surgeons. I believe it

is not too late to show my appreciation to my dedicated and hard working members of the 2015-2017 Council.

Our Society has grown by leaps and bounds since then, and we are a recognized and respected Society currently, not only in Malaysia but internationally.

I wish our society and members a bright future.



MEHESHINDER SINGH (2017-2019)



First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the current council members of the Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons (MSCRS) for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this book of memoirs, in recognition of a Society that has played a pivotal role in my professional career.

I was fortunate to be part of a group of colorectal surgeons who, in 2003, collectively formed a special interest group with the objective of improving the quality of colorectal surgery in Malaysia. This initiative led to the establishment of MSCRS, which was formally registered with the Registrar of Societies Malaysia in 2005. Dr Samuel Tay became the inaugural president. Since its founding, the Society has grown in numbers and has pursued its mission to promote colorectal services through a multitude of activities, with the flagship event being the annual conference, usually held on the first weekend of March. The inaugural conference took place in March 2003 in Malacca.

With the approval of the president, I invited several senior Enterostomal Therapy (ET) nurses to collaborate with us and, together, we developed a separate track for ET nurses which run concurrently with the track for doctors. Recognizing the vital role that ET nurses play in our daily practice, the parallel ET nurse programme has been a regular feature of our annual meetings ever

since. I had the honour of drawing up their programs for several years thereafter.

In 2014, MSCRS took a significant step by incorporating colorectal cancer patients and survivors into the scientific programme. As the founder of the Colorectal Cancer Survivorship Society of Malaysia (CORUM), I was pleased to include them as an integral part of our annual scientific meetings.

Throughout the years, I have had the privilege of serving the Society in various council positions, with the highlight being my term as president from 2017 to 2019. One of the key initiatives at the Annual General Meeting which I chaired was the creation of a WhatsApp group to link all MSCRS members. The goal was to keep members informed about upcoming MSCRS-related activities and announcements that would benefit the Society as a whole.

Among the highlights of my tenure as president was hosting the 17th Congress of the Asia Pacific Federation of Coloproctology (APFCP) at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from 14th to 17th March 2019. I was honoured to serve as the Organizing Chairman for this prestigious event. With just under 800 delegates in attendance of six pre-congress, workshops and four parallel scientific tracks, the Congress was a huge success. The hard work and dedication of the organizing committee were key factors in the event's success.

Today, MSCRS continues to thrive and grow, and I am proud to have played a part in this esteemed Society's journey.



ISMAIL SAGAP (2019-2021)



The COVID-19 pandemic brought forth challenges that none of us had ever anticipated. As nations around the world adapted to the new norm, professional organizations also had to rethink their strategies, particularly when it came to carrying out activities it has been entrusted to. The Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons (MSCRS), like many other medical organizations, faced the daunting task of transitioning to virtual platforms for key activities such as lectures, symposia, forums, and even scientific debates. It was a period of immense uncertainty, yet the resilience and adaptability of the Society proved to be its strongest assets.

A LEAP INTO THE VIRTUAL UNKNOWN

As the pandemic struck, MSCRS had to take a bold step into uncharted territory. A virtual meeting was a new frontier for many of the Society members, and there was a palpable sense of caution. Everyone was being extra careful, waiting for others to take the lead. No one had any experience with running high-stake medical events virtually. This was not just about ensuring smooth technological operation but about maintaining the integrity and quality of the contents delivered to the audience.

One of the greatest sources of anxiety was how the Society could still offer valuable contents like scientific debates, symposia, and forums in a virtual format. Would healthcare companies continue to support such programs? Could the same level of engagement and participation be achieved without the face-to-face interactions that traditionally defined such events?

For MSCRS, the answer was not immediately clear, but the desire to overcome these obstacles pushed the Society forward. Despite the unknowns, the leadership decided to give it a go, and the result was more than anyone had expected.

ADAPTING TO A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

The transition to virtual events meant that the Society had to embrace some fundamental changes:

1. **The need for virtual meeting platforms:** It was clear that new tools and platforms would be essential. There were no more in-person registrations or meeting spaces to manage. The technology became the backbone of the entire operation, with organizers working tirelessly to ensure a seamless experience for speakers and participants alike.
2. **No in-person networking:** The absence of luncheons, tea breaks, and informal networking sessions meant that participants could no longer meet face-to-face to exchange ideas and build professional relationships in the same way. This brought a certain sense of isolation to the event, but it also pushed the Society to innovate ways of facilitating networking in virtual settings.
3. **Reduced sponsorships:** Traditionally, sponsorships played a significant role in funding such events. However, the virtual format resulted in fewer sponsorship opportunities, given the lack of physical presence and the uncertainty of virtual engagement's effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, the Society pressed on. It wasn't just about adapting to a new format but also about finding ways to thrive in it.

A SURPRISING SUCCESS

What emerged from this difficult transition was nothing short of a triumph. The virtual meetings and events were successful in ways that no one had imagined. Participation levels were high, the content was engaging and, perhaps most importantly, the Society made a significant profit. This unexpected financial success provided the foundation for an exciting new possibility for the future of MSCRS: the purchase of an office space in the Medical Academies Malaysia Building in Putrajaya.

During the pandemic, as the members of MSCRS came together virtually, they not only managed to hold their events but also laid the groundwork for a long-term legacy. This moment marked a turning point in the Society's history - a moment where members of the MSCRS, despite facing the challenge of a global health crisis, found strength in unity, adaptation, and innovation.

VIRTUAL NETWORKING BEYOND BORDERS

Another significant development during the pandemic was the expansion of the Society's reach. Through virtual platforms, MSCRS was able to conduct symposia and networking events that involved colleagues from across Southeast Asia and beyond. This global engagement helped strengthen the bonds within the medical community and provided the Society with a broader platform to share knowledge and expertise.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, MSCRS rose to the occasion and turned obstacles into opportunities. What began as a cautious experiment with virtual events ended with a series of successes, including a strong financial position and a more connected international network.

LOOKING AHEAD

The journey of MSCRS during the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a testament to the power of adaptability. What was once seen as a daunting transition to the virtual world became a defining moment in the Society's history. The success of these initiatives not only ensured the continuity of its educational mission but also set the stage for new growth and opportunities

As the pandemic continues to reshape how we work and interact, MSCRS remains a shining example of how professional organizations can adapt, thrive, and come together, even in the face of uncertainty. The virtual success story has proven that with innovation, collaboration, and the willingness to embrace change, even the most unexpected circumstances can lead to extraordinary outcomes.



APRIL CAMILLA ROSLANI (2021-2023)



INTRODUCTION

Serving as the President of the Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons (MSCRS) from March 2019 to March 2021 was a transformative experience, both for the Society and for me personally. This period marked an era of increased international engagement and collaboration. These years were also defined by the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which tested our resilience and adaptability.

Having served on the MSCRS Council since 2011, balancing it with multipartite roles as an academic surgeon gave me a unique perspective on MSCRS' potential for growth. Looking back, my tenure was shaped by three key objectives: strengthening international collaborations, expanding educational and research activities, and navigating the Society through the pandemic while ensuring continuity of training, professional development and patient care.

ASCENDING TO THE PRESIDENCY: A MOMENT OF CHANGE

My journey as President began on the heels of a significant achievement - the hosting of the 17th Congress of the Asia Pacific Federation of Coloproctology (APFCP)

in Kuala Lumpur in 2019. The success of this event, which brought together colorectal surgeons from across the Asia-Pacific region, was a testament to Malaysia's growing influence in the field.

It began with Dr. Sarkunnathas' tenure as President (2015-2017) when I was given the task to present a bid to the APFCP Board at the 2015 Congress in Melbourne, Australia. We were up against Singapore, Philippines and Taiwan, but with the help of the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), Malaysia was able to put up a strong case and successfully won the bid. This marked the beginning of four years of hard work, as we had not hosted an event of this magnitude before. Working with a professional event organizer (PCO), collaboration with MyCEB and marketing and financial planning were either new to us, or on a scale we had not attempted before.

The experience reinforced my belief that MSCRS had the potential to be a regional leader. When I became President of MSCRS, I had already completed my tenure as President of APFCP, which had been an honour not just for me but for Malaysia as well, signalling our arrival on the global stage. This position opened doors to meaningful collaborations with international colorectal societies, including those from Europe, the United States, Korea, and ASEAN countries. I took office determined to build upon this momentum

Nevertheless, I was almost immediately served two curveballs.

CURVEBALL 1 - A NEW HOME?

While MSCRS at this juncture did not have a permanent office, we had a secretariat that was based in the Academy of Medicine of Malaysia (AMM), whose premises were in the Jalan Tun Razak Medical Academies Building, opposite Hospital Kuala Lumpur. We had also newly formed a Chapter within the College of Surgeons, which was also housed in this building. AMM had to relocate due to land redevelopment, and the search for a new home, amid the pandemic, added to the sense of instability. While AMM eventually opted for a new building in Putrajaya, MSCRS members went through much soul-searching, with many robust discussions, on

whether we required permanent office space and, if so, whether to relocate to the new Medical Academies Malaysia Building in Putrajaya. While final agreements are still on-going, the process of engagement and open discussion with all members having a say is something that I feel we can be proud of.

CURVEBALL 2 - NAVIGATING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to the global healthcare system, and colorectal surgery was no exception. As elective surgeries were deferred, we had to rethink our approach to patient care, training, and professional development.

One of my key responsibilities was ensuring that our members had access to up-to-date guidelines on managing colorectal diseases during the pandemic. We collaborated with international bodies to develop best practices for colorectal cancer screening, surgical decision-making, and infection control.

At the same time, we worked to safeguard training opportunities for our young surgeons. With international travel restrictions in place, many planned fellowships were postponed or cancelled. In response, we expanded virtual training programs and arranged local mentorship opportunities to ensure that trainees could continue to develop their skills.

STRENGTHENING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Recognizing the importance of cross-border partnerships in surgical education and research, we actively sought opportunities to engage with international sister societies. Our participation in collaborative studies, particularly through the European Society of Coloproctology (ESCP), increased significantly. We became involved in global research efforts such as the EAGLE study, which allowed our members to contribute to and benefit from large-scale, multi-center investigations, and presented our findings at ESCP Research Webinars.

We also facilitated the placement of Malaysian colorectal surgeons in renowned training centers worldwide. Our goal was to expose our Fellows to advanced surgical techniques that were not widely available in Malaysia at the time, such as cytoreductive surgery with hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemotherapy (CRS-HIPEC) and complex pelvic exenterations. These experiences enriched our surgeons' skillsets and brought cutting-edge expertise back home.

In addition to research collaborations, our engagement with international societies led to increased visibility and participation in global forums. Malaysian representatives spoke at international congresses, including the International Colorectal Surgery Forum in



Opening ceremony of the Virtual APFCP 2021, hosted by Taiwan.



Virtual Coloproctology 2021



ESCP Global Research Webinar 2021



Virtual Coloproctology 2022



Virtual Coloproctology 2022 - onsite organizing committee members, ensuring smooth live transmission.

Taiwan and the ASEAN Society of Colorectal Surgeons conference.

ENHANCING EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Education remained a cornerstone of our efforts. The adoption of Colorectal Disease as our official journal was a landmark achievement. This affiliation not only provided our members with access to high-quality scientific literature but also encouraged them to contribute to the growing body of colorectal research. In both 2021 and 2022, MSCRS published reports of its activities in this journal. Through our link with APFCP, we also became affiliated with its official journal, *Annals of Coloproctology*.

In addition, we consolidated our involvement in the National Colorectal Training Committee. Reigniting our link with the Colorectal Weekend CME activities organized by the Training Committee, we provided some much needed funding to avoid conflicts of interest with sponsorship from industry. This allowed us to take the events to locations across the country, allowing greater engagement with Fellows and trainers alike. A highlight was the event in Pulau Redang, which was attended by many MSCRS members.

While our annual scientific congress in 2020 managed to skirt pandemic restrictions and was held in-person, unfortunately, the 2021 iteration had to be adapted to a virtual format due to the pandemic. Despite initial challenges, the event was a success, drawing nearly 500 delegates. The scientific program included sessions on cutting-edge surgical techniques, debates featuring international experts, and dedicated tracks for trainees, allied health professionals, and colorectal cancer survivors. *Coloproctology 2022*, with its theme of Teamwork, also remained a virtual event. It was a welcome return to in-person congresses in 2023. *Coloproctology 2023*, which was held in Kuching, Sarawak, was themed 'Beyond Precision', and saw an international audience converging for exciting presentations and discussions.

We also introduced quality assurance measures for continuing professional development (CPD) activities. The shift towards virtual education, though necessitated

by the pandemic, provided us with a new perspective on the benefits of remote learning. During this period, we began engaging with the AIS Channel, a not-for-profit educational platform in collaboration with industry partners, which allowed our members to share educational lectures with the rest of the world. This later expanded into a dedicated MSCRS platform, which also served as a repository for our annual Coloproctology Congress lectures.



Virtual Coloproctology 2022



Induction of new members, Coloproctology 2023



Colorectal Weekend, Redang Island, 2023



APFCP Board meeting at the APFCP 2019 Congress in Kuala Lumpur



MSCRS Council at APFCP 2019

LEGACY AND REFLECTIONS

As my term came to an end in 2023, I reflected on how far the Society had come. Our engagement with international bodies had reached unprecedented levels, our educational activities had grown in scope, and our resilience had been tested by the pandemic. I was proud to pass the leadership on to my successor with a strong foundation in place.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my presidency was witnessing the increasing diversity within our Society. The proportion of female colorectal surgeons had risen significantly, and mentorship programs were actively supporting the next generation of leaders in the field.

Looking forward, I see MSCRS continuing to grow as a key player in global colorectal surgery. The second hosting of the APFCP Congress in 2025 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah is a reflection of our sustained prominence. As we move ahead, our focus must remain on raising colorectal cancer awareness, improving patient access to specialized care, and fostering the next generation of surgeons through international exposure and collaboration.

My time as President of MSCRS was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my career. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues, mentors, and international partners who supported our shared vision. As I transition into my role as a Past President, I remain committed to the Society's continued success and look forward to seeing MSCRS reach even greater heights in the years to come.



Past and Present MSCRS Presidents

LUQMAN MAZLAN (2023-2025)



INTRODUCTION

Serving as the President of the Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons (MSCRS) has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my professional career. It was a tenure marked by growth, collaboration, and significant strides in colorectal surgery in Malaysia. Reflecting on my presidency, I am immensely proud of what my predecessors and I have achieved as a Society - not only in advancing professional standards but also in fostering international partnerships and raising public awareness about colorectal diseases.

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

One of the key objectives during my tenure was to enhance our already respected position as a regional player in the field of colorectal surgery. To achieve this, we worked tirelessly to establish and deepen collaborations with international organizations such as the European Society of Coloproctology (ESCP), the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS) and the ASEAN Colorectal Society.

Our partnership with ESCP through their Global Reach Initiative was particularly transformative. This initiative allowed Malaysian colorectal surgeons to benefit from global collaborative research and knowledge-sharing platforms. The collaboration also facilitated the exchange of best practices, ensuring that Malaysian surgeons remained at the forefront of advancements in colorectal surgery. Through joint workshops, webinars, and symposia, we built bridges that not only elevated our skills but also enhanced the visibility of MSCRS on the global stage.

Similarly, our engagement with ASCRS provided our members with access to a wealth of resources, including specialized training programs and international conferences. These collaborations were instrumental in enabling Malaysian colorectal surgeons to contribute to and learn from the global community.



MSCRS Committee 2023-2025

ORGANIZING THE ASIA PACIFIC FEDERATION OF COLOPROCTOLOGY (APFCP) CONGRESS

One of the highlights of my tenure was taking part in helping MSCRS in organizing the Asia Pacific Federation of Coloproctology (APFCP) Congress in 2019. This has helped and prepared me to chair the organizing committee for the upcoming 2025 congress. The APFCP 2019 Congress was a monumental event that brought together experts from across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. It served as a platform for sharing innovative research, discussing challenges, and fostering collaboration among colorectal surgeons.

The success of the 2019 Congress was a testament to the hard work and dedication of our organizing committee headed by our past presidents Professor Dr April Roslani and Dato' Dr Meheshinder Singh. We were able to attract a diverse group of speakers and participants, ensuring a rich exchange of ideas and experiences. From live surgical demonstrations to interesting panel discussions, the Congress showcased the best of what the field had to offer.

As we look forward to hosting the APFCP 2025 Congress, I am confident that it will build on the successes of 2019. The preparations are already underway, and I am pleased to see that the Society continues to prioritize excellence and innovation. This upcoming congress will



With Professor April Roslani at the ESCP conference in Vilnius 2023.

undoubtedly reinforce Malaysia's position as a hub for colorectal surgical expertise in the Asia-Pacific region.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS ON COLORECTAL CANCER

While advancing the professional development of our members was a key focus, I firmly believed that engaging the general public was equally important. During my tenure, we launched several initiatives aimed at raising awareness about colorectal cancer, which remains one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths in Malaysia.

Our public engagement campaigns included community outreach programs, educational workshops, and media collaborations. We worked closely with hospitals, non-governmental organizations, and local communities to spread the message about early detection and prevention. By emphasizing the importance of regular screenings and a healthy lifestyle, we sought to empower individuals to take charge of their colorectal health.

One of our most impactful initiatives was the 'Colorectal Cancer: Detect it, Prevent it!' campaign, which aimed to increase colorectal cancer awareness among the Malaysian public. We organized the Colorectal Cancer Awareness Run 2024 which helped achieved this. Additionally, we leveraged digital platforms with our industry partners to reach a wider audience, creating



At the flag off during Colorectal Run 2024 at Eco Ardence in July 2024



With ASEAN colleagues at the ASEAN Colorectal Society Meeting in Manila in March 2024

informative videos, social media content, and webinars that addressed common questions about colorectal cancer.

ESTABLISHING SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS) WITHIN MSCRS

Another significant achievement during my presidency was the creation of an avenue for members to form Special Interest Groups (SIGs) within MSCRS. Recognizing the diverse interests and expertise of our members, we aim to establish SIGs that provide focused platforms for discussion, research, and collaboration in specific areas of colorectal surgery.

The formation of SIGs will not only enrich the professional lives of our members but also strengthen MSCRS as an organization. By catering to the specific needs of our members, we hope to ensure that the Society remains relevant and responsive to the evolving landscape of colorectal surgery.

REFLECTIONS AND GRATITUDE

As I reflect on my time as President of MSCRS, I am filled with gratitude for the unwavering support and dedication of my colleagues. None of these achievements would have been possible without the collective efforts of our members, the executive committee, and our partners.

Leading MSCRS was both a privilege and a responsibility. It required vision, perseverance, and a deep commitment to advancing the field of colorectal surgery. While the journey was not without its challenges, the progress we made together far outweighed the obstacles.

I am particularly proud of how we balanced professional development with public engagement, ensuring that our work had a meaningful impact on both our members and the wider community. The friendships and collaborations forged during my tenure will remain with me for a lifetime.

LOOKING AHEAD

As I pass the baton to the next committee, I am confident that MSCRS will continue to thrive. The foundations we have built - from international collaborations to public awareness initiatives and SIGs - will serve as a strong platform for future growth. My hope is that MSCRS will remain at the forefront of colorectal surgery, not only in Malaysia but also on the global stage. By continuing to prioritize innovation, collaboration, and public health, I am certain that the Society will achieve even greater heights in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

In closing, my time as President of MSCRS was a period of immense growth, learning, and accomplishment. It was an honour to serve, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of colorectal surgery in Malaysia and beyond. As I look back on this chapter of my life, I do so with pride and optimism for the future of MSCRS.

NURHASHIM HARON

(2025-2027)



PERSONAL VISION FOR MSCRS: ENHANCING COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS

In the world of social media where misinformation has become so pervasive, the public is often left confused and, at times, misled when sourcing for credible information relating to colorectal cancer. My vision for MSCRS is for it to be the 'go-to' and credible source of information and to increase awareness on colorectal cancer among the public in Malaysia. The statistics from the National Cancer Registry reveal a disturbing trend; colorectal cancer is among the highest prevalent cancers in our country, with many patients presenting at advanced stages of the disease. This is due to the fact that many people are not aware of signs and symptoms of colorectal cancer.

We aim to change this trend and see more patients seeking advice and consultation at a much earlier stage. We want more people to be aware of the disease and go for early screening. In order to do so, we need to increase our efforts in public engagements. So, we will continue to reach out to the public and increase the awareness of colorectal cancer via online and offline platforms; ie public forums, social media engagements, increase availability of educational materials on the signs and

symptoms of colorectal cancer, the screening process, and the importance of early intervention. We also aim to increase the availability of these educational resources in the community health centers.

Through collaborations with other stakeholders, we aim to increase the availability of screening tests including stool tests and colonoscopy. Through various efforts, our ultimate aim is to reduce the number of patients presenting with late stages of colorectal cancer.

VISION FOR MSCRS: OPENING DOORS FOR CAREER PATHWAYS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

As the MSCRS membership continues to grow, it is clear that we are cultivating a vibrant community of professionals dedicated to advancing colorectal surgical services in Malaysia. Observing the diverse niches and specialties among our colleagues, I believe we have a unique opportunity to enhance the impact of our services towards Malaysian healthcare.

CAREER PATHWAY DEVELOPMENT

MSCRS will continue to lead the initiative in creating structured pathways for career advancement within the field of colorectal surgery. By identifying various specialties and niches, we can guide our members toward opportunities that align with their interest and strengths.

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

We will continue to establish and maintain an extensive networking platform, locally and internationally,





that will be essential in helping our members grow professionally. We continue to organise regular networking events, workshops, and conferences that bring together experienced surgeons and newcomers, facilitating connections that will lead to mentorship and collaborative projects.

TRAINING AND FELLOWSHIP PLACEMENTS

MSCRS will continue to identify potential training and fellowship placements, which are crucial for the professional development of our members. We will continue to partner with leading institutions, both locally and internationally, to provide information and access to specialized training programs. This will not only enhance individual skill sets but also elevate the overall standard of colorectal services in Malaysia.

We will ensure the provision of Colorectal Surgical services are safe, up-to-date and in line with the national and international guidelines. We will also continue to provide continuous medical education by way of conferences, workshops and networking events.

Together, we can ensure that our members are well-equipped to navigate their careers and make meaningful contributions to the field.

By committing to these initiatives, I believe MSCRS will be a strong driving force in continuing to shape the future of colorectal surgery in Malaysia. Our aim is for the MSCRS to be top of mind among the public and professionals for colorectal disease-related matters in Malaysia.

