

Breast Surgery International at the South-East Asia Breast Cancer Symposium 14-16 Jul 2017
Yangon, Myanmar

South East Asia comprises 11 countries, namely, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Philippines, Brunei and Timor Leste. Except for Singapore and Brunei, the rest of the countries are low and middle-income countries. Except for Thailand and Malaysia, there is no universal health coverage in the other countries. Survival from breast cancer is poor, because of diagnosis in late stages and inadequate access to optimal treatment. Myanmar is a low income country with no universal healthcare. Mortality from breast cancer is among the highest in the region.

The South East Asia Breast Cancer Symposium was co-organized by the Ministry of Health and Sports, Myanmar, Shwe Yaung Hnin Si Cancer Foundation in Myanmar, Myanmar Oncology Society, Global Focus on Cancer, and Breast Surgery International, with a theme of “Comprehensive Cancer Care Continuum: Knowledge into Practice” which covered the whole range of cancer control activities ie prevention, early detection and screening, diagnosis, treatment (surgery, radiation therapy and systemic therapy) and palliative care. The chair of the symposium was Professor Rose Htun, President and Founder of Shwe Yaung Hnin Si Cancer Foundation. International speakers included Professor CH Yip, Professor Omar Youssef and Professor SVS Deo from BSI, as well as representatives from BCI 2.5 (a global campaign to reduce disparities in breast cancer outcomes), WECAN (Women’s Empowerment Cancer Advocacy Network), Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, WHO and UICC. There were also speakers and representatives from most of the SE Asian countries.

The symposium started with a workshop on 14 Jul 17 on breast cancer control, where participants were divided into 8 workshops covering prevention, early detection, pathological diagnosis, surgical treatment, medical treatment, radiation treatment, palliative care, and patient support. The three outputs from these workshops are:

1. What are the challenges regarding capacity for providing standard of care
2. What are the opportunities and suggestions to improve optimal delivery of care, and
3. What are the research needs (research collaboration between countries).

The surgery group was led by Professor Yip and the results of the workshop was presented by Professor Deo. Breast surgery remains a very undeveloped area in parts of SE Asia particularly in Myanmar and Cambodia, where there is no breast surgery service, and breast surgery is carried out by general surgeons. In Myanmar, because of the lack of radiation facilities, majority of patients received the modified radical mastectomy, and hardly any breast reconstruction is done. We had an interesting discussion about whether breast reconstruction is a luxury in low income countries, with mixed conclusions. Reconstruction not only needs expertise that need to be developed, but also enough operating time. During the discussion, the pathology group reported that women were required to pay for the immunohistochemistry (IHC) tests for ER, PR and HER2, and hence 90% of cancers did not have IHC done, and tamoxifen was given for everyone. Indeed the commonest treatment was modified radical mastectomy and tamoxifen. There was a shortage of manpower in all areas, surgeons, pathologists, radiologists, oncologists as well as nurses. The surgery group discussed the need for training, and for development of subspecialties in the hospitals, and also about the potential for collaborative research projects with the other South East Asian countries. A gala dinner was held in Karaweik Palace after the workshop, and guests were entertained to a cultural show featuring Myanmar dances.

The next day, 15th July, was the main symposium, and BSI contributed to the symposium on challenges in surgical management, which was chaired by Professor Yip and Professor Htin Oo.

Speakers were Professor Deo, Professor Youssef, and Dr Arunmoy Chakravorthy, who is the representative from RCSEd, Dr KY Ong from Singapore and Dr Satoko Watanabe from Japan. Topics were resource stratified guidelines for low and middle income countries, sentinel lymph node biopsy and various aspects of oncoplastic breast surgery.

The BSI workshop for the local surgeons was on 16 Jul 2017 at the University of Medicine (1). As requested by the local surgeons, there were two sessions, one on oncoplastic surgery and the other one on locally advanced breast cancer. The workshop was well-attended by nearly 100 surgeons and surgical trainees, and was chaired by Professor Aye Mon, the Head of the Department of Surgery. Professor Youssef and Professor Aye Mon chaired the session on oncoplastic surgery while the session on locally advanced breast cancer was chaired by Professor Deo and Dr May Thwe. Besides Professor Yip, Professor Deo and Professor Youssef, other speakers included Dr Arunmoy Chakravorthy from UK, Dr Phuong Tran from Vietnam, and Professor Nur Aishah Taib from Malaysia. The workshop was organised Dr May Thwe, a lecturer in the University of Medicine (1), who aspires to be an oncoplastic breast surgeon.

BSI will return to Myanmar to run workshops as well as teaching sessions in the near future. It is hoped that we continue the collaboration with the surgeons in Myanmar and help to develop a teaching programme for breast surgery in Myanmar.

Dr Cheng-Har Yip President BSI





