

Program lets international plastic surgeons SHARE in educational wealth

By Paul Snyder

Plans often change, but 2020 has demonstrated a particular knack for throwing a wrench in everything from buying groceries to building plastic surgeon capacity on other continents.

During Plastic Surgery The Meeting 2019 in San Diego, The PSF past-President Andrea Pusic, MD, MHS, and Amanda Gosman, MD, discussed a new partnership with COSECSA (The College of Surgeons of East Central and Southern Africa) and the Surgical Society of Kenya, to provide plastic surgery training and long-term sustainability to areas in sub-Saharan Africa such as Rwanda, where there are two plastic surgeons for a population of more than 12 million people. The doctors discussed the work ahead in the January/February issue of *PSN* ("This is our future"), an initial educational trip and boot camp was on the books for mid-March and the dawn of a new international frontier for The Foundation loomed.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic arrived on U.S. shores and all trips were canceled.

"I was so disappointed that we weren't going to be going," Dr. Pusic recalls. "But given that our primary focus is on education, the immediate question became how we're going to teach if we can't be there. It forced us to take a fresh look and see this whole project through a different lens. All of the sudden, it became, 'Wow, we can actually deliver so much more education virtually.'"

Surgeons in Humanitarian Alliance for Reconstructive, Research and Education (SHARE) is a new program from The PSF that seeks to enhance collaboration to improve care and surgical capacity in regions that have limited numbers of plastic surgeons and high incidences of conditions requiring plastic surgery treatment. The program is tailored to local learners and their environment through three core components: global learners, global educators and global researchers.

"We've had such impressive growth with our international membership and MOU nations that we felt that trying to give back – and figure out how we can partner with all of these international entities – should go hand-in-hand with working to bring access to reconstructive surgical care to areas of the world that don't have it," Dr. Gosman says. "Even though the pandemic changed plans, a lot of advantages remain because it provides more access by being less-expensive and helps us build that virtual infrastructure. It's powerful because it just makes the whole world a little bit smaller."

Although the original number of learners – the residents and junior surgeons who demonstrated interest and ability in plastic surgery to establish an online community for regular case presentations, lectures, collaboration and mentorship – was set at 10, Dr. Pusic says it was easy to scale-up the program to 18 from different areas throughout Africa.

"Sometimes when we're locked into a particular model of thinking, it's easy to get stuck in that mindset of travel, lecture and work with these few people," she says. "Having the time to reassess things

really opened our eyes – we can double the number of global learners we accepted into the first class. It's been just so exciting to see these young surgeons who are either residents or in early practice who are thrilled to be part of the program and will have access to the educational materials of the ASPS, the international service exam and mentorship and virtual teaching from ASPS members."

Providing mentorship

Now the Society and its members around the world are stepping up to provide that mentoring. ASPS has an application available online at ThePSF.org/SHARE for domestic and international members – Dr. Gosman notes a desire for MOU countries to take advantage of opportunities for regional mentorship and collaboration – to take part in the program.

The third piece of the puzzle is the global researchers, which also works toward the development of mentorship.

"My hope is that we can provide access to some of our research curriculum to support how to write journal articles and put together ethics boards in hospitals," Dr. Gosman says. "That's something

that's actually pretty difficult – a barrier in a lot of these places is that they don't have a process for doing research or going through ethics approval unless they're based out of the university. We also want to look at offering opportunities to apply for The PSF grants and help with manuscript preparation, maybe even partner with *PRS Global Open* to have some kind of spotlight on this SHARE community."

In addition to a presentation on the SHARE program on Oct. 14 as part of vPSTM, there will also be a panel on Oct. 24 on ethics in global plastic surgery that includes leaders from several different countries discussing some of the ethical dilemmas that SHARE will have to address going forward and conducting different models of outreach. More information on SHARE can be found at the-psf.org under the "Programs" tab.

It's important material to learn, Dr. Pusic says, not only for now – when so many different countries can have access to the ASPS educational library – but also for the day when travel can resume to provide the hands-on, O.R. training that virtual education cannot.

"There's always going to be a need to teach and operate in the O.R.," Dr. Pusic

says. "But at the same time, we're sitting on a wealth of materials that are essential to the formation of a high-quality plastic surgeon. There are going to be a lot of mentorship opportunities that will break from our traditional proposal of, 'OK, you need to commit to being able to travel this far, be away from your family for this period of time,' and so on."

Dr. Gosman notes the big takeaway of the program is that it ultimately will be a multi-directional operation.

"When we look at the future of our own Society and of our specialty – being a residency program director myself – one of the highest demands that we see from our applicants and from our residents are opportunities to work in a global space and to learn from being able to apply the concepts of plastic surgery outside of just the U.S.-based healthcare system," she says. "There's a lot of value to membership and getting them involved in multiple levels. This program isn't just designed for that class of learners – we're really looking at ways to incorporate our own membership and have this be a highly collaborative, international opportunity. We'll learn so much from our colleagues elsewhere in the world, as well." **PSN**

