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# The history and focus of the ASEAN Deans' Summit and ASEAN Medical Schools Network

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of the development of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015, the ASEAN Medical Schools Network (AMSN) was established in 2012 by Clinical Professor Udom Kachintorn during his tenure as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University. The AMSN aims to promote friendship and collaboration among leading medical schools in the ASEAN region, achieve excellence in medical education and healthcare, share human resources, and assist in capacity building in medical education and research. Through the AMSN, the ASEAN Medical Deans' Summit (AMDS) establishes a platform for deans and leadership of the regional medical schools to meet to discuss, share and brainstorm over key challenges in medical education and health care, creating a cohesive framework and leading to a unified action and solutioning among ASEAN nations. This flagship summit of the AMSN seeks to share research development in common areas of interest and develop common basic global standards in medical education and healthcare systems through cooperative efforts and strategic partnerships. The summit also provides opportunities to explore student exchange cooperative student projects across the region.

## II. HISTORIC GATHERING

In a landmark event for the ASEAN community, the 1st summit marked the first-ever assembly of medical education leaders, including Deans and Rectors, from the 10 ASEAN member states: Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the

Philippines, Singapore, and Brunei. This historic convergence took place in September 2012 at Siriraj Hospital, Bangkok, Thailand, serving as a pivotal platform for these leaders to share their visions, exchange collaborative ideas, and set the stage for future joint initiatives. In the spirit of ASEAN centrality, the summit underscored the importance of collective action to address the healthcare needs of the 600 million people within the ASEAN community, highlighting the potential for significant advancements through shared expertise and resources.

## III. DIVERSE PARTICIPATION

The inaugural summit witnessed the active participation of 12 renowned medical schools from various ASEAN countries, enriching the collaborative discussions with a wide array of perspectives and experiences. The founding institutions included:

- PAPRSB Institute of Health Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam
- Faculty of Medicine, University of Health Sciences, Cambodia
- International University, Cambodia
- Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Indonesia
- Faculty of Medicine, University of Health Sciences, Lao PDR
- Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia
- University of Medicine, Yangon, Myanmar
- University of Medicine, Mandalay, Myanmar
- University of Philippines College of Medicine

- Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore
- Faculty of Medicine, Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University, Thailand
- Faculty of Medicine, Ramathibodi Hospital, Mahidol University, Thailand
- Hanoi Medical University, Vietnam

These institutions played a critical role in the success of the summit, contributing their unique insights and expertise to the collective dialogue aimed at enhancing medical education and healthcare across the region. Since inception, other ASEAN institutions have also joined the group adding diversity and new perspectives to the AMSN. The newer schools include:

- Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
- Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia
- University of Santo Thomas, Philippines
- University of East Ramon Magsaysay, Philippines
- Faculty of Medicine, Ramathibodi Hospital, Mahidol University, Thailand
- University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Vietnam
- Hue Medicine and Pharmacy University, Vietnam

#### IV. ASEAN MEDICAL SCHOOLS NETWORK ORGANISATION

The establishment of the AMSN during the inaugural AMDS provided the organisational structure to facilitate sustained collaboration and strategic planning for the network. The AMSN is chaired by a rotating President decided by consensus during the AMSN board meeting, and each President term runs for 2 years. The President is supported by a secretariat that leverages on the administrative structure of the institution the President comes from. The annual AMDS is also hosted by rotation across the member institutions of the AMSN and decided by consensus at the board meeting. Institutions can tap on financial support from a generous donation by the China Medical Board if needed to host the annual meeting. Through early discussions, the network established four specialised working groups to realise its mission: each tasked with addressing key areas essential for the advancement of medical education and healthcare systems within ASEAN. The working groups are:

- Education Work Group: Focused on standardising and enhancing medical education curricula across member institutions to ensure high-quality training for future healthcare professionals.
- Student Exchange Work Group: Aimed at promoting student mobility and exchange programs to foster cross-cultural learning and collaboration, thereby

enriching the educational experience and broadening the perspectives of medical students.

- Research Work Group: Dedicated to advancing collaborative research efforts, sharing resources and expertise, and addressing regional health challenges through joint research projects and initiatives.
- Accreditation Work Group: Tasked with developing and implementing accreditation standards and processes to ensure that medical schools within the ASEAN network meet basic globally recognised benchmarks of excellence.

#### V. KEY ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES

In the early years, the AMSN supported student-led collaborative project – ASEAN Student Collaborative Project (ASCP) where student groups from the respective institutions come together to share and collaborate in joint projects. The students would run their programme in parallel to that of the main AMDS. Where appropriate, the students are also given opportunities to present to the Deans a summary of their discussions. The student meetings also included student dialogue sessions guided by local faculty and later evolved to a formal student chapter within the AMSN in 2022 and an addendum was appended to the AMSN charter.

The research working group fostered a spirit of sharing and collaboration across a range of areas from public health, infectious diseases (HIV, dengue, TB, COVID-19) and non-communicable diseases (cancer, biomarkers, cardiovascular and aging). In order to facilitate greater collaboration, an ASEAN Research Collaborative Fund (ARCF) was set up with a funding provided by the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS) and administered by a committee chaired by the University of Malaya. The ARCF provides support for travel grants, joint symposia and meetings.

For education, discussions over curricular harmonisation, transfer of credits, faculty development, consolidation of local journals on the web and student exchange were made. The covid pandemic accelerated the use of IT and virtual platforms across the region and spurred the conception of 2 webinar series in the region hosted by the Centre for Medical Education (CenMED), YLL School of Medicine, NUS. A 7-part webinar series in 2021 on “Lessons learnt during the pandemic and strategies in the new normal” provided a platform for many in the region to share their experiences and best practices. This was followed in 2022 with the AMSN “Webinar series 2” which focused on key education issues using a panel discussion format. To continue the regional spirit of sharing, the Global Classroom project

was developed and anchored by Siriraj Hospital to share lecture videos on the CenMED Scholar platform.

Through a process of discussion and a regional institutional survey, a set of basic medical education quality indicators for the ASEAN region was developed. The indicators were refined by a pilot application of the indicators through an internal assessment of the key member institutions. It was felt that the indicators would be useful as a benchmark for developing schools in the region. However, further developments were paused with the advent of the WFME review and use of the WFME global standards.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The ASEAN Deans' Summit represented a historic milestone in the journey towards collaborative advancement in medical education and healthcare within the ASEAN region. By bringing together leaders from across the region and establishing a structured network, the summit laid the groundwork for collective action and continuous quality improvement. The collaborative efforts initiated at this summit have the potential to significantly enhance the quality of medical education and healthcare delivery, ultimately benefiting the vast population of the ASEAN community. As the network continues to grow and evolve, it stands as a testament to the strength of diverse perspectives in the region and power of collective action in achieving shared goals and addressing common challenges.