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History of medical education in Myanmar

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Abstract

Introduction: The medical education system of Myanmar has evolved through a dynamic history influenced by colonial legacies, national development efforts, and global collaborations. This article explores the progression of medical education in Myanmar, focusing on its historical milestones, challenges, and advancements in response to societal and healthcare needs.

Method: This study is based on a comprehensive review of historical records, policy documents, and academic literature, with "A Concise History of Medical Education in Myanmar" by Aung Than Batu as a primary reference. Key milestones, collaborations, and innovations were analysed to trace the evolution of medical education from the colonial period (1907) to the present day. Quantitative data, including the number of medical universities, training durations, and infrastructure developments, were included for a clearer perspective.

Results: The analysis highlights transformative milestones, including the establishment of the first medical school in 1907 and Rangoon Medical College in 1927. Over time, Myanmar has adapted to challenges such as resource constraints and political instability by fostering international collaborations and leveraging technology. Teaching methods have evolved significantly, integrating modern technologies alongside traditional pedagogies.

Conclusion: Myanmar's medical education exemplifies resilience and adaptability. By aligning its system with global standards, fostering research, and leveraging international expertise, the nation continues to contribute to global medical education and healthcare. This narrative serves as an inspiration for countries navigating similar challenges in medical education.

Practice Highlights

- Myanmar's medical education journey began in 1907, blending indigenous practices with Western methodologies, and expanded post-independence with the establishment of multiple medical universities.
- Myanmar overcame challenges like resource limitations and political instability by fostering global collaborations and integrating modern technologies into medical education.
- The MBBS program combines robust theoretical knowledge with clinical training, while postgraduate education emphasises research, making Myanmar a contributor to global medical advancements.

I. INTRODUCTION

Myanmar, a nation of profound cultural richness and historical depth, unfolds a narrative that intricately intertwines with the evolution of its medical education system. This comprehensive overview embarks on a journey through the diverse facets of Myanmar's medical education landscape (Batu, 2015). Beyond a mere chronological exploration of historical administrative periods, it endeavors to unravel the intricate threads woven into policy development, the establishment of medical universities, and the ceaseless pursuit of addressing challenges and seizing opportunities within the nation's healthcare and educational sectors. The journey begins in 1927, with the establishment of the

Rangoon (Yangon) Medical College, a milestone in introducing formal medical education during the British colonial era (Batu, 2015). This marked the fusion of indigenous healing traditions with Western medicine, laying the foundation for a unique and dynamic approach to healthcare education (Coderey, 2021). After independence in 1948, the nation's commitment to advancing medical education became evident with the expansion of medical facilities and the development of policies aimed at addressing the healthcare needs of its population. By the 1960s, the establishment of additional institutions, such as the Institute of Medicine (I), reflected Myanmar's growing emphasis on training a competent cadre of healthcare professionals. In 1970, the

establishment of the University of Medicine 2 in Yangon further demonstrated this dedication to expanding medical education access (Batu, 2015). Infrastructure development and facility expansions in subsequent decades signaled foresight that extended beyond immediate requirements, highlighting a long-term vision for excellence and capacity-building in medical education (Batu, 2015).

Amidst challenges such as resource limitations and periods of political instability during the 1980s and 1990s, the story Myanmar of took a resilient turn, transforming obstacles into opportunities. International collaborations, such as partnerships initiated in the 2000s, and the adoption of technological advancements emerged as beacons of progress, underscoring the adaptability and determination of Myanmar to elevate the standards of its medical education (Saw et al., 2019). As Myanmar enters the 21st century, it not only continues to address its domestic healthcare needs but also contributes to the global context. Its influence reverberates through research contributions, milestones in undergraduate and postgraduate medical education, and a commitment to integrating public health perspectives (Saw et al., 2019). Myanmar emerges not just as a nation shaping its healthcare narrative but also as a participant in the broader discourse on global health, contributing to the collective effort to address worldwide health challenges (Proserpio, 2022).

II. ADMINISTRATIVE PERIODS IN MYANMAR

Colonial Era (1824–1948): Under the shadow of British rule, the colonial period of Myanmar bore witness to the initial introduction of Western medicine. The 1860s marked the beginnings of formal medical education when the British established training programs for healthcare workers to address the needs of colonial administration and military personnel. In 1927, the foundation of the Rangoon (Yangon) Medical College became a pivotal moment in the integration of Western methodologies into Myanmar's medical education system. This era marked the confluence of indigenous healing practices with the methodologies imported during colonial occupation (Coderey, 2021).

Post-Independence Era (1948 onwards): The post-independence period signaled a fervent drive by Myanmar to shape its own destiny. The establishment of the Institute of Medicine (I) in the 1960s marked a significant step toward creating specialised medical education institutions to cater to the nation's healthcare needs. This commitment was further exemplified by the opening of the University of Medicine 2 in Yangon in 1970, ensuring broader access to medical education. In 1992, the Defence Services Medical Academy (DSMA)

was established as the nation's sole military medical university, dedicated to training medical professionals for the armed forces. With six medical universities in total five civil institutions and one military. The country has demonstrated a sustained effort to expand medical education. This era also saw the formulation of policies aimed at strengthening public health systems and addressing resource limitations, particularly during the politically turbulent 1980s and 1990s. These efforts laid a strong foundation for Myanmar's aspiration to build a healthcare system reflective of its cultural identity and societal requirements (Coderey, 2021).

III. MEDICAL EDUCATION POLICY IN MYANMAR AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL UNIVERSITIES

The evolution of medical education policies in Myanmar from 1950 onwards has been a dynamic and adaptive process. Over the years, these policies have responded to societal needs, embraced technological advancements, and aligned with global standards in medical education. A key focus has been the alignment with international benchmarks, ensuring that the education imparted equips Myanmar's medical graduates to meet and exceed global standards in healthcare delivery. Myanmar's journey in medical education began in 1907, with the establishment of the Government Medical School in Yangon, which laid the groundwork for structured medical training. The pivotal moment came in 1927, with the establishment of the Rangoon (Yangon) Medical College, formalising Western medical education. Following independence in 1948, the nation prioritised medical education policy development, leading to the creation of the Institute of Medicine (I) in the 1960s and the University of Medicine 2 in 1970 (Batu, 2015). The subsequent decades witnessed the growth of additional medical universities, including the University of Medicine, Mandalay, and the University of Medicine, Magway, which were established to decentralise medical education and improve access. Infrastructure development and the expansion of facilities became pivotal strategies, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, to accommodate the surging demand for medical education and enhance the overall quality of healthcare provision. These initiatives reflect the commitment of Myanmar to fostering a robust and sustainable healthcare system (Batu, 2015).

IV. CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND MEDICAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

Throughout its history, the medical education system of Myanmar has faced formidable challenges, ranging from resource limitations to periods of political instability, such as during the politically turbulent 1980s and 1990s (Saw et al., 2019). Despite these adversities, these

challenges have served as crucibles for transformation, providing opportunities for resilience and innovation. By the 2000s, Myanmar actively embraced international collaborations, partnering with global institutions to strengthen its medical education framework. These collaborations have acted as catalysts for overcoming structural and educational challenges, fostering knowledge exchange, and enhancing training methodologies (Proserpio, 2022). In recent decades, technological advancements have presented unprecedented opportunities to bridge gaps in medical education delivery. For instance, the integration of e-learning platforms and simulation-based training since the 2010s has improved both accessibility and quality, enabling students across Myanmar to benefit from innovative educational tools (Saw et al., 2019). This dual narrative of challenges and opportunities paints a dynamic picture of Myanmar's medical education landscape one that is continuously evolving and adapting to the shifting sands of the global healthcare arena.

Myanmar's indelible mark on medical education research is a testament to its commitment to academic excellence. The country has emerged as a significant contributor to the global knowledge base in medical education, particularly since the early 2000s, fostering an environment where researchers explore innovative methodologies and address critical questions within the field in 1990s (Saw et al., 2019). Myanmar's researchers, often collaborating across borders, have played a pivotal role in advancing educational practices worldwide. The research landscape in Myanmar is characterised by a diverse array of studies, including pedagogical approaches, curriculum development, and assessments of educational outcomes. Researchers have delved into the effectiveness of various teaching methods, the impact of cultural nuances on medical education, and the integration of technology into learning strategies (Coderey, 2021). These endeavors not only enhance the quality of medical education within Myanmar but also contribute valuable insights to the broader international community. the commitment of Myanmar to medical education research extends beyond national boundaries, with researchers actively engaging in cross-cultural studies and collaborative projects. Examples include partnerships with institutions in Southeast Asia and beyond, leading to impactful studies on public health education and global health challenges (Proserpio, 2022). This collaborative spirit enriches the local research landscape and fosters a global exchange of ideas, ultimately elevating the standards of medical education on an international scale.

V. UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION AND POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

Undergraduate Medical Education in Myanmar: The structure of undergraduate medical education in Myanmar has undergone a transformative journey, evolving into a robust system that imparts a comprehensive understanding of medical science. The curriculum, meticulously developed over the decades, strikes a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of healthcare. Milestones in curriculum development have played a pivotal role in shaping an adaptable and rigorous educational framework. Since the establishment of the Government Medical School in 1907 and the introduction of formal undergraduate medical training at Rangoon Medical College in 1927, Myanmar has continually refined its approach to align with global standards while addressing local healthcare needs (Batu, 2015). The integration of foundational medical sciences with clinical training, particularly from the 1960s onward, has created a holistic educational experience.

Clinical Training: Clinical training is a cornerstone of undergraduate medical education, offering students invaluable exposure to patient care, medical decision-making, and collaborative healthcare practices. From the 1970s, rotations in diverse medical specialties were formalised, enabling students to gain insights into the multifaceted nature of healthcare delivery. This hands-on approach fosters the development of critical thinking, diagnostic acumen, and a patient-centered mindset. Despite challenges such as resource constraints and political instability during the 1980s and 1990s, the resilience of Myanmar has been evident. By the 2000s, international collaborations and advancements in technology allowed for significant improvements in medical education delivery (Batu, 2015). Initiatives such as e-learning platforms and virtual simulations have enhanced accessibility and quality, ensuring a dynamic learning environment.

Outcomes and Global Impact: Graduates of Myanmar undergraduate programs emerge with a blend of strong theoretical knowledge, practical skills, ethical grounding, and communication proficiency. Many contribute to the global medical community, bringing cultural understanding and internationally recognised expertise to diverse healthcare settings.

Postgraduate Medical Education in Myanmar: Myanmar postgraduate medical education system has witnessed substantial transformation, adapting to the increasing demand for specialised expertise in healthcare (Saw et al., 2019). The diversification of postgraduate programs since the 1980s reflects a commitment to align with global standards while addressing the unique challenges of the nation's healthcare system.

Specialised Training and Research: Postgraduate training emphasises advanced clinical skills and specialisation across medical disciplines. From the 1990s, research became an integral part of postgraduate education, fostering innovation and addressing critical healthcare gaps. Myanmar postgraduate students actively contribute to cutting-edge research, positioning the nation as a hub for medical advancements (Batu, 2015). This dual focus on research and clinical expertise ensures the preparation of professionals capable of tackling evolving healthcare challenges.

Collaborative Endeavors: International collaborations have played a pivotal role in enhancing postgraduate medical education. Partnerships with regional and global institutions have facilitated the exchange of expertise and best practices, enriching both training programs and research initiatives (Proserpio, 2022). These efforts underscore Myanmar's commitment to participating in and contributing to the global medical community.

Outcomes and Ethical Practice: Myanmar postgraduate medical education is characterised by a dynamic interplay of specialised training, collaborative research, and a steadfast commitment to ethical medical practice (Rosenbaum et al., 2021). This multifaceted approach elevates the capabilities of healthcare professionals and enhances the overall standard of healthcare delivery, both nationally and internationally.

VI. CONCLUSION

Myanmar's history of medical education is a dynamic narrative marked by resilience, adaptability, and the ability to turn challenges into opportunities. From its early adoption of Western medical practices during the colonial era to the establishment of a robust and evolving educational framework, Myanmar has consistently demonstrated a commitment to excellence. This global perspective highlights Myanmar's efforts to align its medical education system with international

benchmarks, contribute substantively to medical research, and actively engage in global public health initiatives. As Myanmar continues to shape its medical education landscape, it stands poised to make lasting contributions to global healthcare. Myanmar's unwavering dedication to excellence not only enhances its own healthcare system but also enriches the global discourse on medical education and public health, positioning the nation as a vital contributor to the collective effort of improving global health outcomes.

Notes on Contributors

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Declaration of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in the current research.

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