AMSEP Internal Audit - A Behind The Scenes Into Medical Students' Exchanges during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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Introduction:

Exchange programs have been practiced globally, especially among medical students. It is an arrangement where students from different countries interchange to explore the academic, socio-cultural and community service realms of their counterparts. Prior research has revealed the benefits of exchange programs among medical students and has recommended the globalization of the same 1]. These exchanges are highly desired by medical students as the majority claim that it helps them expand their horizons by inculcating differing views of medical practice. This can be done by incorporating a better understanding of social and public health awareness, the importance of cultural sensitivity and the differences in opportunities in the medical field of different countries [2].

The Asian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) International is one such peak representative medical organization which has grown through the years since its establishment in 1985, carrying the aim to foster unity and promote everlasting bonds amongst its members. The Asian Medical Students' Exchange Program

(AMSEP), conceptualized in 2003, acted as a conduit for the same with its first pilot exchange program in 2006. AMSEP not only restricted itself to the Asian continent but also expanded itself by including students from the UK, Egypt, Australia, etc. with the number of exchanges steadily increasing each year without compromising on the quality of exchanges.

Through this program, AMSA members are given the opportunity to partake in a 5 to 10-day exchange. The activities held during the AMSEP exchange makes it unique from its equivalents as it follows the pillars: Academic, Sociocultural and Community Service. All of the exchanges conducted are derived from the foundation of AMSA's philosophy of Knowledge, Action, and Friendship.

Due to the pandemic, medical student organizations have seen high numbers of cancellations and postponements in exchanges which have deprived students of the opportunity to experience these fine opportunities for training, exchange and sharing [3]. Despite this, AMSEP weathered the storm and grew to higher levels proving to be the standard for exchanges globally. Since this growth has never been documented, this study aimed to measure and compare the growth of AMSEP through the tenures of 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021 and the ongoing tenure of 2021/2022.

Results:

AMSEP steadily progressed from 13 member countries or 'chapters' (20%) in the tenure of 2018/2019 & 2019/2020 to 17 chapters (26.15%) during the tenure of 2020/2021. Exponential growth was found in the tenure 2021/2022 amidst the second wave of the pandemic to 22 chapters (33.85%) as depicted in *Figure 1*.

Figure 2 graphically represents the Tenure-wise summarization of AMSEP Contracts. 2018/201 documented a total of 22 physical AMSEP contracts and all of them were carried out. Followed by which in the tenure of 2019/2020, out of the 28 contracts which were assigned to all the chapters, 21 (75%) were carried out while 7 (25%) were terminated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the epicenter of the pandemic, AMSEP shifted to a virtual basis in the tenure 2020/2021 with a total of 26 contracts carried out with 10 (38.46%) from the past tenure and 16 (61.54%) from that tenure. With the feasibility of virtual exchange, 2021/2022 drew an unprecedented 53 contracts out of which 49 were fresh

while 4 were carried out from the past tenure. Thereby almost doubling from the previous tenure.

In retrospect, a tenure-wise summarization to understand the different backgrounds of delegates in AMSEP was done and depicted in *Figure 3* and tabulated in *Table 2*. These were derived from the Official AMSEP Delegate Application Form through informed consent. In the tenure of 2018/2019, out of the 165 delegates, the major contributors were Taiwan - 64 (38.79%), China - 39 (23.64%) and Malaysia - 30 (18.18%). Whereas in 2019/2020, out of the 320 delegates who took part in either physical or virtual exchanges, Indonesia predominated with 89 delegates (27.81%), followed by Malaysia with 58 delegates (18.13%) and Taiwan with 46 delegates (14.38%). During 2020/2021 exchanges were only conducted on a virtual basis. Out of 916 delegates Indonesia had the maximum of 243 (26.53%) followed by 177 Taiwanese delegates (19.32%) and 117 Malaysian delegates (12.77%).

The educational status of the delegates was gauged through the aforementioned form to understand the sector from which students partake in exchanges. It can be seen clearly depicted through the bar graph in *Figure 4* and tabulation in *Table 3*.

Through our partner organization the European Medical Students´ Association (EMSA), AMSEP chapters increased their opportunities to conduct exchanges with their European counterparts via the European- Asian Medical Students' Exchange program (EAMSEP). A tenure-wise summarization of EAMSEP contracts carried out from the past tenure is shown in *Figure 5*. The contracts double in the current tenure showing the fondness for the EAMSEP exchange.

The Official EAMSEP Delegate Application Form gave valuable insight into the number of delegates and their backgrounds which is entailed in *Figure 6* and *Table 2*. The tenure-wise summarization of the nationality of delegates from previous tenures was not available due to beta testing of EAMSEP Exchanges in the early stages. The form helped measure the educational status of the delegates partaking in these exchanges. Out of a total of 80 delegates in the tenure of 2020/2021, 69 (86.25%) delegates were in their preclinical year, 8(10.00%) in the clinical year and 3 (3.75%) had graduated as shown in *Figure 7* and tabulated through *Table 3*. The educational status and nationality of the delegates from

previous tenures were not available due to the beta testing of EAMSEP Exchanges in the early stages.

As a recent partner, FAMSEP has had a peculiar appeal to most chapters in AMSEP. With beta testing in 2020/2021, only 2 contracts were assigned to judge the feasibility of the program after which the number of exchanges quadrupled to 8 in the tenure of 2021/2022(*Figure 8*).

Through the Official FAMSEP delegate application form, it was found that out of the 34 delegates that took part in the exchanges held via FAMSEP in 2020/2021 the nationality was maximum from Malaysia with 19 delegates (55.88%) followed by India with 14 delegates (41.18%) and the United States of America with 1 delegate (*Figure 9* and *Table 2*).

The official FAMSEP delegate application form also brought to notice that out of the 34 delegates who took part in the exchanges occurring in the year 2020/2021 where the maximum number of delegates (i.e. 21 - 61.76%) were in their preclinical year followed by 13 (38.24%)in the clinical year(*Figure 10* and *Table 3*).

Discussion:

The COVID-19 pandemic did take its toll on physical exchanges conducted by AMSEP; with the travel restriction and force majeure. This brought a huge transition from Physical to Virtual exchanges. These significant changes had a transitional effect, but once stabilized, the number of contracts and the number of chapters participating escalated steeply. This steady growth is attributed to the lack of opportunities presented by other medical organizations [3] and the applicability and efficiency of a Virtual AMSEP, which is more accessible than its Physical compeer. Chapters are more likely to do a visual tour as it proves to be less demanding and is easier to balance with their medical curriculum. On top of that, Clinical and Graduate Medical students are more likely to participate in Virtual AMSEP due to the flexible schedule.

Hosting Virtual AMSEP is quicker with lesser arrangements required; hence it contributes to the steady growth of contracts per year. The total number of delegates partaking in AMSEP as shown by Taiwan and Indonesia has created more opportunities for them to opt for and carry out more contracts per year.

Other chapters have shown increments as well. Chapters such as

Bangladesh and Hong Kong, which previously did not partake in exchanges, have successfully partaken in AMSEP by sending in an appreciable number of delegates.

Not to mention our collaboration with EMSA and FAMSA. The number of contracts for EAMSEP and FAMSEP has strenuously grown. It has proven to be a fruitful collaboration with EAMSEP and FAMSEP owing to the vastness of cultures and academics across continents.

However, despite various increments, several chapters show a reduction in their number of contracts, such as China, Japan and Singapore. It might be due to human resources issues and virtual fatigue (also known as “zoom fatigue” colloquially)[4] which have proven to be a significant problem in virtual exchanges.

Through the framework set in AMSEP, we see that it is a sustainable and ever-growing platform for medical students worldwide to experience knowledge, action, and friendship through academics, socio-cultural and community service. We hope that in the coming years more medical students explore the opportunities it has to offer and avidly take part in both virtual and physical exchanges alike.

Tables:

Table 1: Tabulated summarisation of the Tenure-Wise Distribution of AMSEP Contracts depicted graphically in Figure 2.

Tenure	Contracts Carried Out	Contracts Terminated	Contracts Carried out from Past Tenure	Total Number of Contracts
2018/2019	22	0	0	22
2019/2020	21	7	0	28
2020/2021	16	0	10	26
2021/2022	49	0	4	53

Table 2: Tabulated summarisation of Delegates participating in AMSEP, EAMSEP & FAMSEP throughout the years on the basis of Nationality.

Nationality	AMSEP			EAMSEP		FAMSEP
	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2019/2020	2020/2021	2020/2021
Bangladesh	0	0	28	0	17	0
Brunei	0	0	1	0	0	0
China	39	0	4	0	0	0
Denmark	0	0	1	0	0	0
Egypt	0	0	1	0	0	0
Hong Kong	1	0	37	0	1	0
India	1	39	108	0	8	14
Indonesia	0	89	243	8	30	0
Libya	0	0	1	0	0	0
Japan	12	34	1	0	0	0
Korea	0	0	8	0	0	0
Macau	0	0	16	0	0	0
Malaysia	30	58	117	0	0	19
Myanmar	0	0	1	0	0	0
Polish	0	0	1	0	0	0
Philippines	0	29	40	0	10	0
Singapore	17	0	3	0	0	0
Scotland	0	0	3	0	0	0
Sudan	0	0	2	0	0	0
Taiwan	64	46	177	26	13	0
Thailand	0	24	102	0	0	0

UK	0	0	6	0	0	0
USA	1	1	12	0	1	1
Ukraine	0	0	1	0	0	0
Vietnam	0	0	1	0	0	0
Yemen	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total Number of Delegates	165	320	916	34	80	34

Table 3: Tabulated tenure-wise summarisation of the Educational Status of Delegates participating in AMSEP, EAMSEP & FAMSEP.

Nationality	**AMSEP**			**EAMSEP**	**FAMSEP**
	2018/2019	**2019/2020**	**2020/2021**	**2020/2021**	**2020/2021**
Pre-Clinical	**143**	**278**	**761**	**69**	**21**
Clinical	**21**	**42**	**150**	**8**	**13**
Graduated	**1**	**0**	**5**	**3**	**0**
Total Number of Delegates	**165**	**320**	**916**	**80**	**34**

Figure 1: Total Number of Chapters taking part in AMSEP throughout the years.

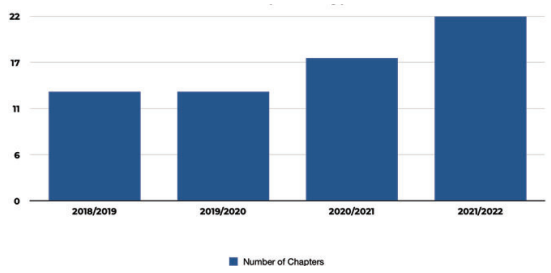


Figure 2: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of AMSEP Contracts

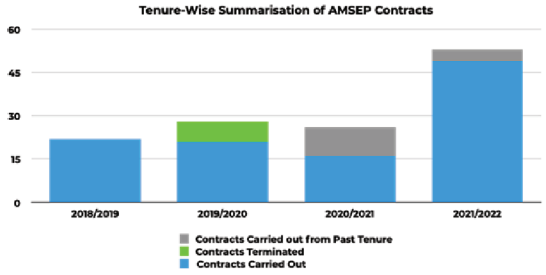


Figure 3: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of the Number of Delegates partaking in AMSEP based on Nationality.

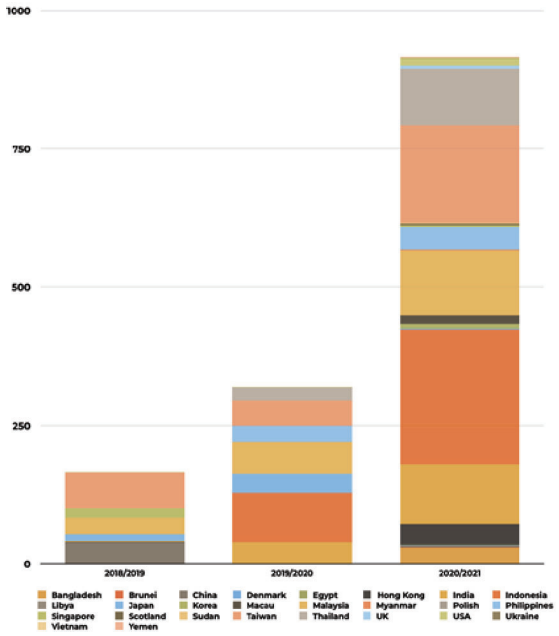


Figure 4: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of the Educational Status of the Delegates partaking in AMSEP.

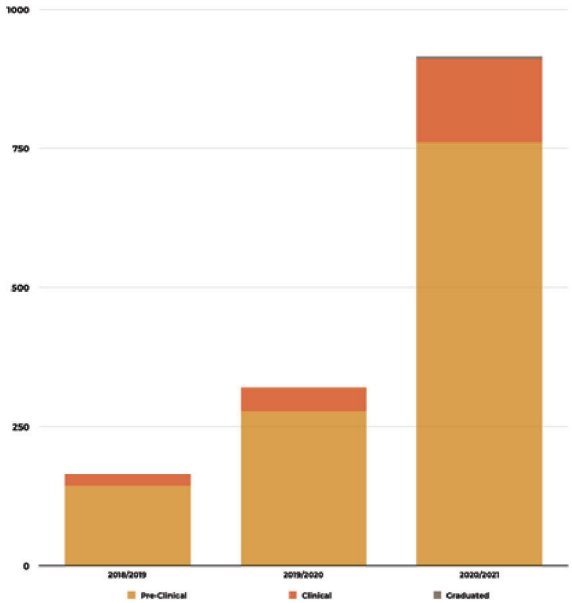


Figure 5: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of EAMSEP Contracts

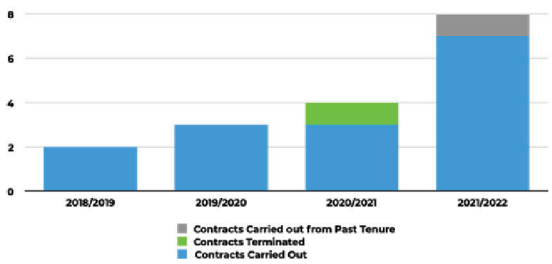


Figure 6: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of the Number of Delegates partaking in EAMSEP based on Nationality.

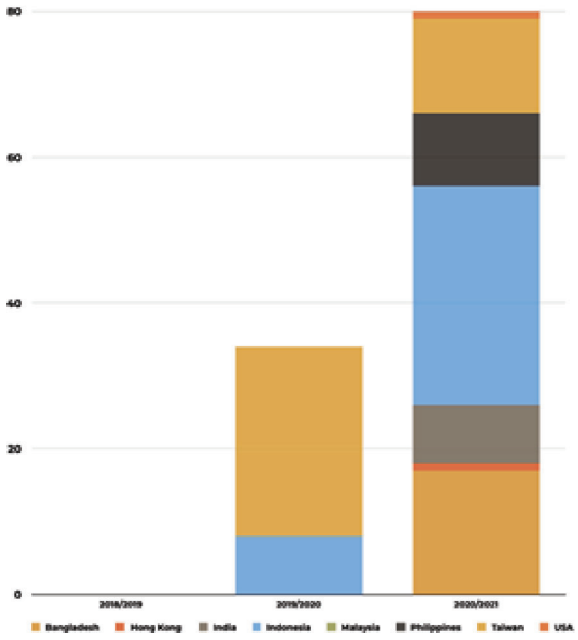


Figure 7: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of the Educational Status of the Delegates partaking in EAMSEP.

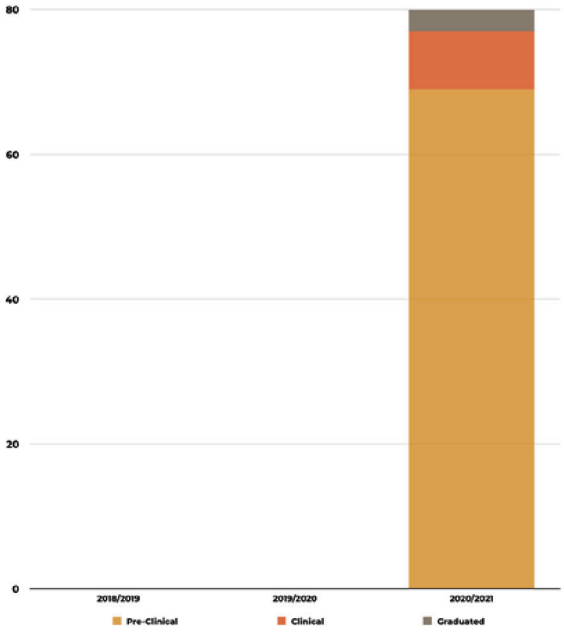


Figure 8: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of FAMSEP Contracts

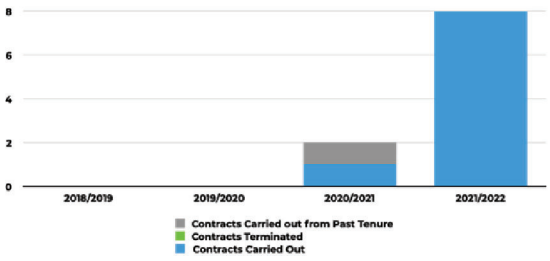


Figure 9: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of the Number of Delegates partaking in FAMSEP based on Nationality.

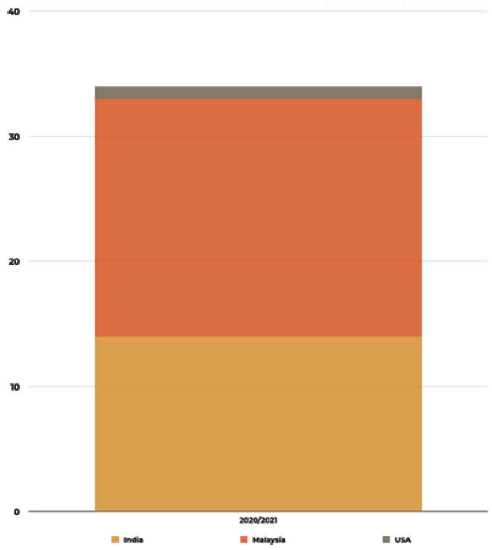
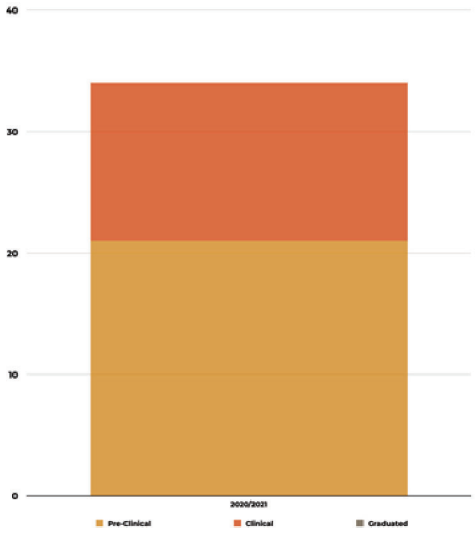


Figure 10: Tenure-Wise Summarisation of the Educational Status of the Delegates partaking in FAMSEP.



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