



West African College of Surgeons 64th Scientific Conference in Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2024

NIHR Global Surgery Unit West Africa Hubs

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Cite as: NIHR Global Surgery Unit West Africa Hubs. West African College of Surgeons 64th Scientific Conference in Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2024. *Impact Surgery*. 2024;1(3):114-115. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.62463/surgery.53>

The Association of Surgeons of West Africa (ASWA) was formed in 1960. In 1969, the West African College of Surgeons (WACS) was established to promote ASWA's objective of postgraduate education and training in surgery in the sub-region. All assets, liabilities and functions of ASWA were transferred to WACS in 1973. The College is made of 18 member countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Cote D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and The Gambia. The faculties of WACS are General Surgery and related sub-specialties as the college may determine in due course, Anaesthesiology, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ophthalmology, Radiology, Dental Surgery and Otorhinolaryngology.

The first Annual Scientific Conference of ASWA was held in Nigeria in 1961. Annual Conferences have been held ever since, hosted in turns by the member countries. The 64th Annual General Meeting and Scientific Conference of WACS was hosted by Sierra Leone in its capital Freetown from the 4th to the 7th of March 2024. The theme for the conference was Access to Safe and Affordable Surgical and Anaesthesia Care in West Africa. The Sub-themes were National Surgical, Obstetric and Anaesthesia Plan for nations of West Africa; Addressing brain drain in the delivery of surgical services in West Africa; Developing surgical leaders of tomorrow for West Africa. Pre-conference activities included a 1.5 day basic laparoscopic course delivered by ALL-SAFE in partnership with WACS, and an outreach that provided over 200 surgical procedures to persons in some parts of Sierra Leone.

The West African Hubs – Ghana, Nigeria, Benin – of the National Institute of Health Care Research (NIHR) Global Surgery Unit (GSU) participated in the 64th WACS annual conference (Figure 1). The group hosted a 1-hour symposium at which some NIHR GSU studies were presented. These included Hernias, Pathway and Planetary Outcomes for Inguinal Hernia Surgery (HIPPO), with a focus on quality and access to care for inguinal hernias in West Africa; and upcoming studies Task sharing in InGuinal hErnia Repair between surgeons and non-surgeon physicians (TIGER), and Disposable versus Reusable drApes and Gowns for green OperatiNg theatres (DRAGON). Figure 2 shows a historical depiction of hernia treatment in Sierra Leone.

The objectives of WACS include cooperating with national and international bodies who also have objectives to promote, assist, develop and advance education and research in Surgery and related disciplines. This aligns with NIHR GSU core pillars of research and innovation and education and training. This common ground offers opportunity to explore partnerships to promote quality surgical care in the sub-region. Furthermore, the NIHR GSU goals of patient and community engagement and achieving impact through advocacy are principles that can be projected together by both groups to carry collaborative research outcomes to policy makers and the communities that surgeons serve.



Figure 1: Meeting of the West African partners of NIHR Global Surgery Unit at the 64th WACS meeting.



Figure 2: Sculpture showing inguinoscrotal hernia treatment in Sierra Leone (Credit – Bintumani Hotel, Freetown, Sierra Leone)

