SPECIAL PAPER

Mahmood Merican Award for Masters in Orthopaedic Surgery Trainees in Malaysia

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The Mahmood Merican Award is an annual award for the best original scientific or clinical study submitted by young trainees in orthopaedic surgery in Malaysia, for presentation during the annual scientific meeting of the Malaysian Orthopaedic Association (MOA). This award was initiated in 1997 to encourage high standard of research and scientific presentations among young trainees.A cash prize of RM 1,000 was donated by Dato Dr Mahmood Merican. All Award finalists will represent MOA as ambassadors to regional orthopaedic association meetings, a duty that will be fully sponsored by MOA.

Dato Dr Mahmood Merican was the third President of the MOA who served the organization from 1983 to 1985. In the late 1990s he decided to donate a substantial sum of money to the Association, the proceeds of which were to fund the prize for an award for research.A decision was made to have the award open to orthopaedic masters trainees, for the reasons noted above. The regulations were carefully prescribed for all potential applicants (Figure 1). The handsome cash prize is also accompanied by the privilege of representing the MOA at regional meetings, fully sponsored by the association. Since it was first offered, the award has become highly sought after and contested, more for the honour than the financial rewards.The award was first offered in 1998 and was won by Dr. Mohd Ros bin Mohd Ali, a trainee from Universiti Sains Malaysia. The standard of papers has remained high and the 13 winning papers have been of varied subject matter. (Table I).

Roughly allocating the winners into various categories, only four have been clinical papers (1998, 1999, 2003 and 2006), perhaps reflecting the difficulties contacting and calling back patients for review. Three other papers analysed a clinical techniques (2002, 2008 and 2009), a trend reflecting the fact that clinicians are attempting to find the answer to a specific clinical problem or difficulty. Three have been animal studies (2001, 2004 and 2010). The first of these was a feline animal model winning the prize in Kuching, Sarawak! Although there were remarks that this was the reason for the award - jokes aside - this study from Universiti Sains Malaysia marked the beginning of willingness of our trainees (and their supervisors) to conduct serious animal laboratory work for their research reports. Two papers have involved stem cells (2007 and 2010), reflecting the explosion of use of stem cells in research and clinical practice. Three papers used cadavers and cadaveric tissue (2002, 2008 and 2009). Cadaveric research involves a lot of hard work and it is commendable that the authors achieved success despite the effort required and despite the difficulties in obtaining cadavers and cadaveric tissue. Five of the papers involved radiological analysis (1998,1999, 2002, 2003 and 2008), reflecting the close cooperation of orthopaedic surgeons with our radiological colleagues. Two papers involved biomechanics (2007 and 2009), emphasising the involvement of biomechanics in our orthopaedic practice. One evaluated a locally produced product (2007). To their credit, this product is being successfully commercially marketed. One rather unique winner was a genetic study (2005).

Six of the thirteen papers have been published, the latest three in high impact journals (Table I).There were several reasons given for winning papers not being published. One winner said he had published other papers based on his original study, although the actual winning study was not published itself. Another said the study had been rejected by two journals but she was still trying to publish it, showing significant effort towards publication. Yet another said that he won the award while he was in the second year, and had to continue to concentrate on his training. Following graduation, he felt that the material was no longer new. It is always preferable to try and publish studies as soon as possible. Another prize winner unfortunately based his study on a drug that was later withdrawn from the market (2004); thus he felt it was no longer appropriate supervisor. As a supervisor trying to get these papers published, my experience is that award winners and Master's graduates in general have a different focus and are too busy with their studies. This indicates a need for universities to assist their trainees to publish before, or soon after, they have graduated. There is more than sufficient motivation for the supervisors to do so, as the pressure to publish for university academic staff is extreme.

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Year	Name	Title of the research	Journal	Impact factor	Tier
1998	Mohd Ros bin Mohd Ali (USM)	Outcome of closed fractures of the tibia treated conservatively	Med J Malaysia 1999		
1999	Mohd Kamal bin Hisa (UKM)	Proximal third femoral shaft fractures in children: prevention of angular deformities using bilateral Thomas splints	Med J Malaysia. 2000 Sep; 55Suppl C:68-73		
2000	Kamarul Ariffin Khalid (UKM)	Evaluation of a Locally-Produced Hydroxyapatite (HA) for Orthopaedic Use	Not published	2001	
2001	Abdul Nawfar Sadagatullah (USM)	Moderate heat treated autograft for bone defect replacement - Based on feline models.	Not published		
2002	Kwan Mun Keong (UM)	Morphometric study of lower cervical spine (C3-C7) related to internal fixation and its correlation with CT scan measurement.	Not published		
2003	Khoo Shaw Ming (UM)	Axial alignment of the lower limbs in Malaysia	Not published		
2004	Sureshan Sivananthan (UM)	The effect of rofecoxib and alendronate on fracture healing: A laboratory study on the rabbit ulna osteotomy model.	Not published		
2005	Shalimar Abdullah (UKM)	Searching for the Pain Gene: Mutations and Polymorphisms in a Malaysian family with CIPA (Congenital Insensitivity to Pain and Anhydrosis)	Journal of Ortho Surg. 2007;15(3):230-3		
2006	Avthar Singh A/L Jaswant Singh (UM)	Comparison between ultrasonic wound debridement and sharp debridement in diabetic foot ulcers: A randomized clinical trial.	Not published		
2007	Suryasmi Duski (UKM)	The development of tissue engineered bone substitute using bone marrow derived mesenchymal stem cells in the treatment of long bone defects - An assessment of biomechanical and histological properties.	Not published		
2008	Chris Chan Yin Wei (UM)	An analysis of the radiographic appearance of the thoracic pedicle and correlation with pedicle screw insertion in cadavers using the funnel technique.	Eur Spine J 2010 Jan;19(1):78-84. Epub 2009 Sep 11.	1.956	2
2009	Low Tze Hau (UM)	Simplifying 4-strand flexor tendon repair using double-stranded suture. A comparative ex vivo study on tensile strength and bulking.	Accepted: J Hand Surg - EurVol	0.82	3
2010	Terence Tay Khai Wei (UM)	The use of chondrogenic differentiated mesenchymal stem cells in treating focal cartilage damage: preliminary study in animal model.	Eur Cells and Materials 2010; 20 Suppl. 2: 45. ISSN 1473-2262	5.378	1

1. The competition is open to all registered trainees currently working in hospitals in Malaysia.
2. The work may take the form of clinical trials, surveys, retrospective studies, laboratory experiments or any other form of unpublished original work.
3. The bulk of the submitted work must be performed by the author himself/herself, even though he/she may have done the work in conjunction with other doctors and agencies from local or overseas institutions. However, the work must be carried out in Malaysia.
4. The author himself/herself should present at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Malaysian Orthopaedic Association if they are shortlisted for the award.

Fig. 1: Award regulations.

The four or five trainees who are shortlisted each year for the award, present their papers to a panel of judges who usually include one or two distinguished speakers invited to the MOA annual congress. The experience of presenting one's work and answering a judge's questions is a learning experience in itself. It is an honour to present one's work for scrutiny by international experts, and it requires artful thought to answer their questions, that may often go straight to the small inadequacy you have attempted to conceal.So far, all the winners have been local trainees. The regulations (Figure 1) do not preclude a foreign trainee from winning and I am sure that with the increasing number of high quality foreign candidates, a foreign winner will emerge sometime in the future.

Malaysian orthopaedic research owes a huge debt of gratitude to Dato Dr Mahmood Merican not only for the donation, but also for the foresight in offering this award. There is no doubt that in the past 13 years, the award has played a role in raising the standard of orthopaedic research in our region.