

## WiSA Newsletter March 2022

Dear WiSA members, COSECSA Family and Friends,

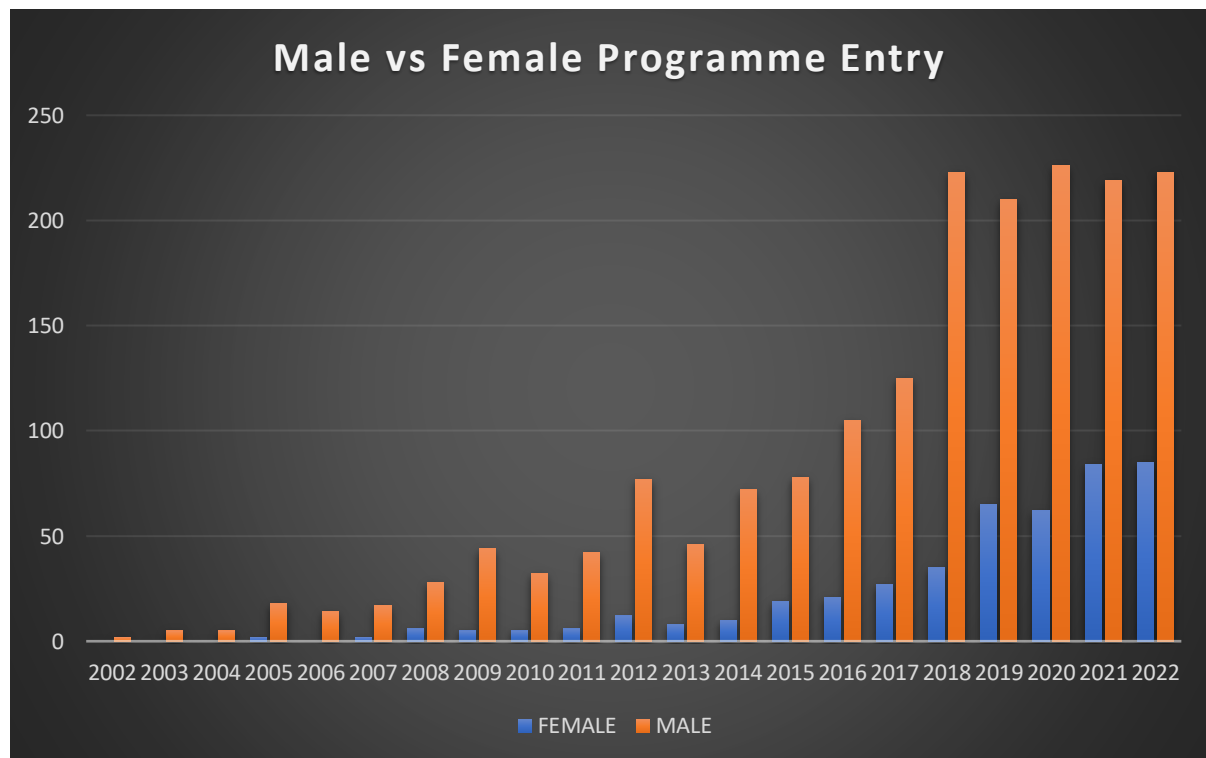
Greetings to you all and compliments of the new year!

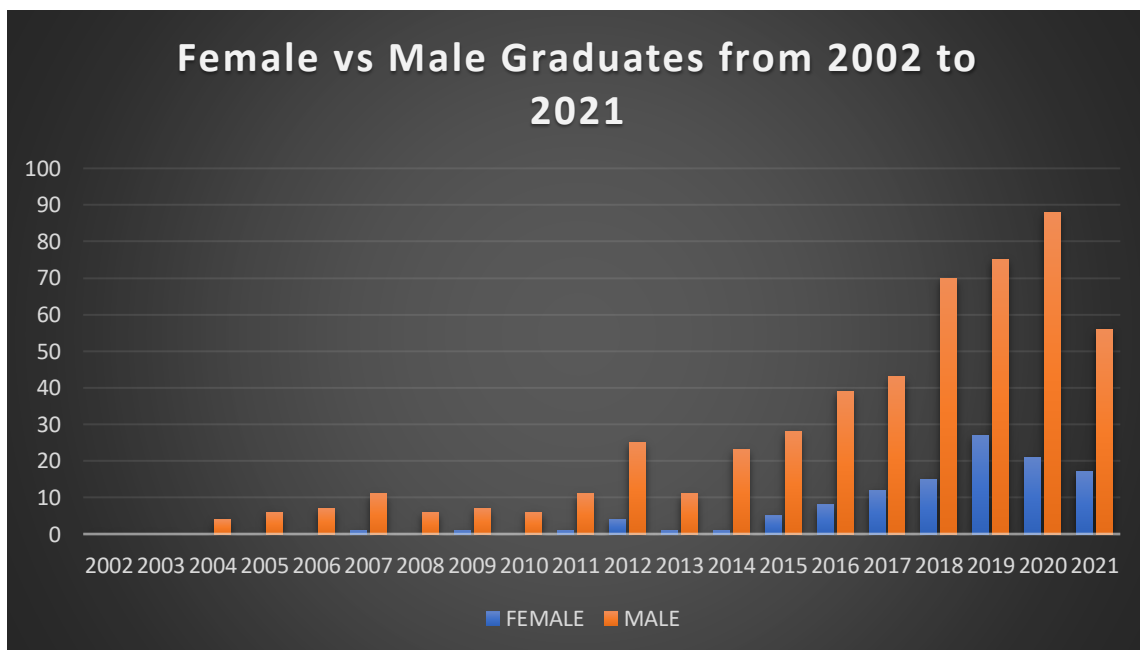
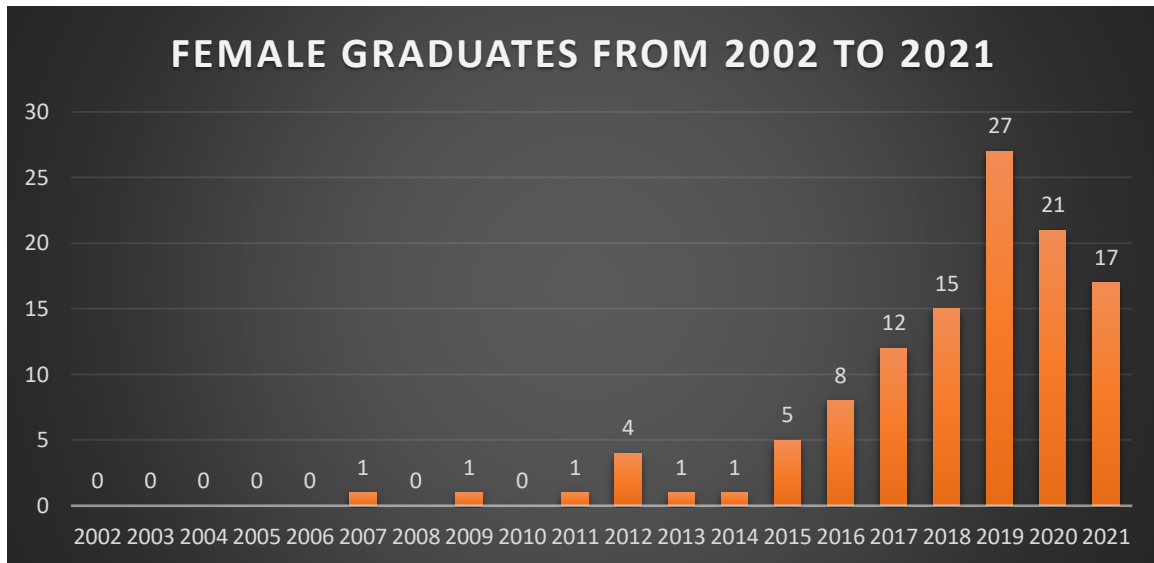
It's our hope that all are well and safe. These past two years have been challenging on many fronts and have made us re-evaluate our lives on a personal and professional level.

As we reflect on this quarter and specifically focus on the meaning of international women's day, we would like to commemorate and celebrate different achievements of women world-wide and specifically in this group. The day marks a call to a gender equal world - free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination and one that is diverse, equitable, inclusive while differences are valued and celebrated.

### Evolution and growth of women surgeons within COSECSA

The College of Surgeons of East Central and Southern Africa, COSECSA, was officially inaugurated in 1999 with the first MCS exams in 2002 and FCS exams in 2004. Over the years, we have seen the number of females entering the programme steadily increase from 2 to 85. Although this numbers are still significantly lower compared to the entry and graduation of male surgical trainees, the steady growth is encouraging, in this year, we have 47 new registered MCS residents and 34 FCS fellows in different surgical sub-specialties.





There has also been an amazing increase of more women branching out into different surgical subspecialties including orthopedics, cardiothoracic, pediatrics, neurosurgery, plastics, and urologic surgery.

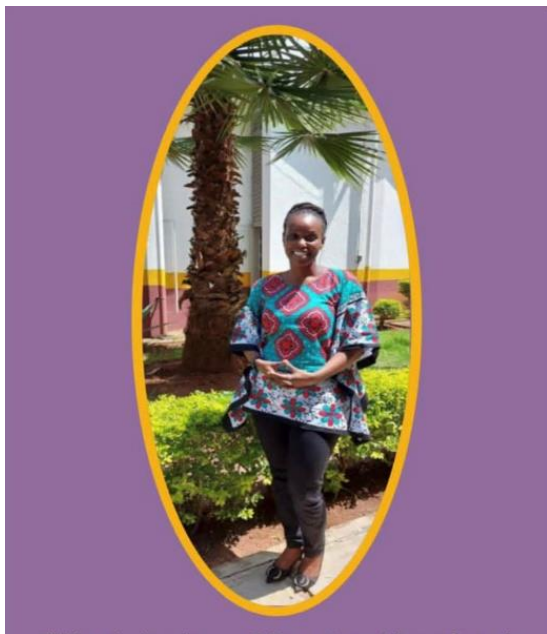
We would like to commend our members for the continued exemplary performance evidenced by the increased number of awards that have been won from best performance at COSECSA membership and fellowship examinations over the years. For 2021, these included Dr. Mercy Mitei MCS, (Kenya), Lydia Nanjula, FCS Neurosurgery (Uganda), Stella Nimanya FCS Pediatric surgery (Uganda), Martha

Konstantin, FCS Otorhalingology (Namibia). We also applaud Dr. Fridah Bosire, FCS General Surgery (Kenya) who won the 2020 Gerald O’Sullivan Award.



**Dr. Fridah Bosire,  
Gerald O Sullivan award winner 2020**

We would also like to express gratitude our partners for their continued support in championing for career advancement and mentorship of WISA trainees. We particularly would like to thank the Association of Women Surgeons (AWS) for the AWSF Scholarships to two outstanding surgeons as well as recognize the nineteen 2021 recipients of the ACS-COSECSEA Women Surgical residents’ program and ACS- Women Scholars program.



**Dr. Wairimu Ndegwa, General Surgery(L) and Dr. Hetal Gohil (Paeds surgery) AWSF scholars**

## Rising through grief and loss



WISA family recognizes the indefinite era that we were plunged into over the past 2 years with the upsurge of the Covid-19 pandemic. In an unforeseeable way, as frontline health care workers, we were forced to bear witness to unimaginable stress added onto an already physically and mentally challenging career. We take a moment to remember and honor colleagues, family and friends who lost their lives in unexpected manner and the difficult strain on the process of grieving imposed by need for social distancing restrictions and the pressing need for continued training or service provision.

## Self-love and self-care



As women, we often attempt to balance multiple hats whether while in training, at the work place, or at home supporting family and friends. Realistically, sometimes this forces us to place aside issues that we may consider 'minor'. Health tends to take back seat for us as we sometimes ignore a lingering headache, breathlessness, palpitations, changes in cycles or sudden change in weight, the chronic physical fatigue, mental strain or creeping burn out. Unfortunately, this may complicate things later. As we strive hard to realize our personal and career goals are we taking care of ourselves? Are we helping our colleges? Do we have stop checks and are we willing to and seek help? Do we champion for spaces and forums at the work place that are conducive to our physical and mental well-being? Let us take up the mantle to do this.

## Hope for a better tomorrow

As we glimpse into the future, WISA family endeavors to embrace the challenges in the past to pave way for a brighter tomorrow.

Due to previously mentioned constrictions, we at the WISA secretariat had multiple operational disruptions and were unable to have our physical WISA AGM And Luncheon. However, when life hands you lemons, make lemonade. After much critical brainstorming and restructuring, and with tremendous support from COSECSA secretariat and stakeholders ( G4 Alliance, RCSI, AWS) we have proposals for how to run our affairs better and be more effective with our goals of encouraging improved enrollment of female medical doctors into surgical training, celebrating current women surgeons and provide counsel and support for advancing career goals while empowering them to take more academic and leadership roles within the college and the region.

In addition to being intentional with our current programs in mentorship, research, travel grants and the Shield Maiden award, specific new objectives for this calendar year include:

1. Introduction of new WISA initiatives:

**#Ask HER to Stand-** WISA will establish a network of senior female international collaborators to work with COSECSA and identified regional female surgeons in WISA to achieve the vision of leadership inclusion within the college.

**WISA Collage-** develop a virtual wall where we will show case and honor women who have forged surgical careers despite great odds and made significant scientific contributions in surgery within the African region.

2. Introduction of leadership courses, webinars, and podcasts. Leading surgeons will be invited to speak on these platforms addressing relevant topics.

3. Through a consultative and transparent process with input from WISA members and approval of the COSECSA secretariat, to re-organize the structure of WISA leadership under the WISA secretariat to include sub- committees that will help with operational affairs of the organization as well as give opportunities for more members to be involved in leadership. These will cover areas of include communications, research, finance (sponsorship, grants, funding), marketing etc. and the roles clearly defined. Online nominations and voting for

These leadership positions will similarly be populated after transparent and inclusive online nomination and voting process.

4. Migrate to a yearly **Virtual WISA conference and AGM with an online voting system** for the incoming WISA secretariat, starting October 2022.  
This will allow wider participation of WISA members in the critical affairs of the group and the college and leadership selection.  
With this provision, we propose to maintain the December physical WISA luncheon or evening cocktail for WISA members present at the annual COSECSA AGM to meet and network, and during the election years, will allow of welcoming and hand over to the incoming WISA leadership.  
For this year, we are hopeful to have the physical meeting in December in Namibia
5. Undertake a transparent and exhaustive review process of the current WISA constitution with sought out input from current WISA members to enable the above outlined objectives and the overall vision and mission of WISA.
6. Develop the Startergic plan for 2023-2026 after a similarly thorough consultative process with WISA members

Timelines and updates on these will be presented subsequently through our social media platforms and official WISA website.



So, whether you are crushing it at the workplace or at home, not just this once but everyday...

**BE bold** and dare to dream beyond what your senses can perceive.

**BE independent**, don't be afraid to own your place at the table, to stand alone in holding true to what you believe in while also recognizing that more is achieved with a great and supportive team.

**BE strong**, to be able to defy all odds, to embrace failure and rise again.



**BE passionate**, find the drive to achieve your dream no matter what, and leave a legacy that ripples in generations to come.

*(Passion is the energy that can be tapped to accomplish deeper life goals- ones that extends well beyond the mundane and material- Aliana Love).*

**From**

**Ms Agneta Odera**

**MBChB, MMEDSci**

**FCS (ECSA) Gen Surg, Peds Surg, Cardiothoracic Surg**

**Outgoing WiSA Chair 2022**