

WiSA December 2022 Newsletter

Message from Outgoing WiSA chair

It has been a great pleasure and privilege working with you and serving you as capacity as Chair in the last couple of years

In Dec 2019, I was asked to reconsider taking a second term as chair. This was a position that I took up after thoughtful and careful consideration knowing how young WiSA was as an organization and the expected great journey of growth ahead.

Shortly after we were plunged in to 2 years of unpredicted Covid pandemic that threw us into disarray, both personally and corporately. Communication across the 14 member countries and co-ordination of activities was already a challenge... the pandemic magnified this, with many WiSA members, as was the rest of the world facing significant personal, health and work-related challenges, Prior potential donor support significantly waned, as funds were directive to more humanitarian efforts for obvious reasons.

Despite all these, I would want to commend everyone for their commitment as we began the journey of recovery, growth and restoration to a new normal.

I am so pleased with the progress that we have made, with increased female enrollment into surgery and surgical specialties, and the stellar performance exemplified over the years. There is increase in the number of the WiSA membership base to 130 members and enthusiastic participation in the mentorship program.

We sparked an interest in research and the Let's Collaborate WISA initiative is taking shape and inspiring research in Africa for Africa. It is also remarkable to see that from our proposals in 2019, the college considered and adopted research methodology into the curriculum for all trainees.

We are providing a safe platform that highlights and addresses the unique and peculiar challenges that women surgeons face.

The general issues related to burn out, physical, emotional and mental well-being are being unmasked, and we hope that all these will continue to be given healthy consideration by the college for all trainees, including our male counterparts.

I'm indebted to all our partners, mentors and HeForShe champions who continue to inspire and encourage us to greatness, and on behalf of WiSA I say thank you.

We are particularly grateful to the partnership of Johnson and Johnson in sponsoring our dinner gala and providing a research grant for 2023 and the partnership of Advances in Surgery (AIS) an online platform for training and research resources

The need to reinvent oneself to cope in a constantly evolving environment is as old as civilization itself.

Our college theme this year is Timely response to current and emerging surgical challenges.

As I reflected about this, it gave birth to our WiSA theme for our gala dinner and AGM 2022.



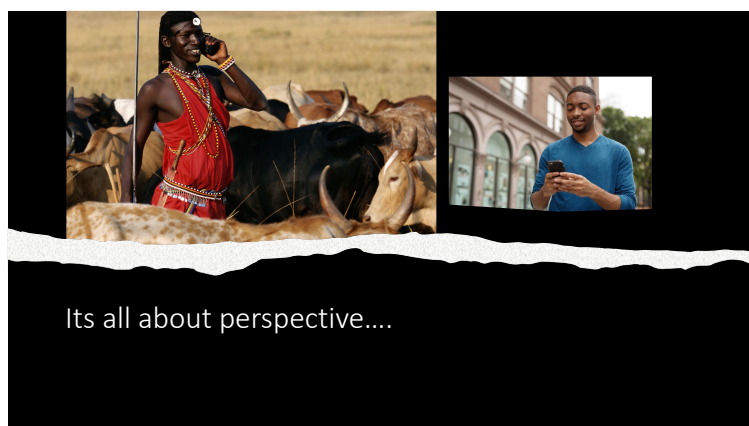
Women surgeons: how can we be at the frontline of surgical solutions and innovations?

First, we must be willing and open to recognize that there is a challenge and more importantly understand what underlying currents drive the present situation we are faced with. This needs you to be sensitive to the needs and situations around you especially when there are many things that dull your sensors and are constantly clamoring for your attention. We may be overwhelmed by the routine and mundane surgical practice that we fail to recognize a problem that needs attention.

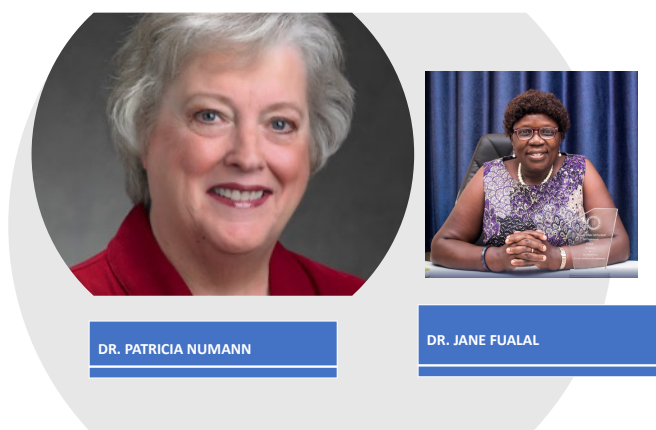
Secondly, we must be healthy enough to process that a sustainable solution is needed. This requires physical, mental and emotional well-being to develop the drive and passion that inspires you to do something differently

Beyond this, one must be brave enough to dare into the unknown, to think out of the box. To do something unconventional that becomes the new norm. In the same token, we must be vulnerable enough to recognize when we need help & to seek for it if we are to remain on the course to actualization.

Lastly, we must be open enough to know that in most circumstances, change is a process, a journey and does not always provide instant gratification.



I have always been impressed by the culture of the Maasai. Despite several years of civilization and significant advancements, they have stuck to their roots and culture, and are very proud of it. But one of the marvels that caught up with them was the technological advancements in communication. They moved from smoke puffs and drumbeats and runners and its always fascinating to see an older Maasai herdsman out in Savannah surrounded by cattle but on the phone. He, however, knows the value of that phone and what it saves him in terms of time and energy and being able to now address things urgently and instantly. On the flip side is a young man he was born into the late 21st century, to him the phone is an obvious routine part of life, he probably has no appreciation of the years of investments, trial and errors in its development, what it took to move from handwritten letters, to telegraphs and moss codes, to landlines and finally to mobile phones. But someone before him had an idea, stuck to it despite all odds and it paid off.



In our midst today we have the distinct honor of having Prof Patricia Numann, the first female president of ACS and the champion of AWS. Every time I feel discouraged, I reflect upon her and her life and then I press on. She joined the surgical profession at a time when there was

*significant challenge in training and more so being a woman in surgery. But because of her dream to make it better, her desire in pushing a rightful and necessary agenda when all odds were against her, her persistence bore fruits which she probably did not enjoy much in her earlier days, but many women surgeons can now revel in. And in this season, we now have our very own **formidable firsts**, Dr. Jane Fualal, the first female president of COSECSA, a beacon and example to many young rising female surgeons in the continent. Madam President, we salute you!!*

What I'm I saying?

As we think of all these necessary and creative ideas, we may have to be an agent for change, I encourage you in this: -

Let us not despise humble beginnings, for it's the cradle of something bigger and better

Let us not be deterred by the process of change, because nothing comes easy

Let us not be halted by what seems like a slow process of growth but in the same token let us not be overtaken by the hurried desire to arrive.

Treasure the journey of change, nurture it, challenge the status quo, think out of the box, be creative!



Sometimes when
you allow yourself
to dream, you will
arrive at the helm
of something really
beautiful
and much bigger
than yourself



And even on this journey that may often seem less travelled, when the task gets daunting, collaborate with like-minded people.

Let's collaborate, lean on the wisdom of those who have gone before you, and the strength of those that journey with you.

Let's collaborate



- Together we can travel a lot further and achieve much more.
- Be the agent of change and solution
- Let's Take WISA to greater heights!!



I conclude with my favorite quote by Maya Angelou.

DO the best you can until you know better, then when you know better, DO BETTER.

It's been an absolute pleasure serving you and look forward to many more years with WISA.

God bless you all, God bless COSECSA. and God bless WISA

To all those who attended and supported our gala dinner both in person and on-line, THANK YOU, the night was special because of all of you!

You can access the event photos at the following url

<https://gallery.milkyway.com.na/womeninsurgery/>

Gallary password: WISA2022

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Fruitful 2023!

MS Agneta Odera

Pediatric General & Cardiothoracic Surgeon

WISA Chair 2018-2022