

Introduction

The number of women living with obstetric fistula outweighs the number of fistula surgeons equipped with the knowledge and skills to provide appropriate, quality care for this very vulnerable group. Thousands of women currently living with a fistula continue to suffer needlessly because of the persisting global treatment gap.

Since 2012, the FIGO Fistula Surgery Training Initiative¹ has been building the capacity of local trainee fistula surgeons – FIGO Fellows – and multidisciplinary teams to provide life-changing surgical repairs and holistic care to substantially more women suffering from obstetric fistula in some of the world’s most underserved communities.

The foundation of the Training Initiative has been the *FIGO and Partners Global Competency-Based Fistula Surgery Training Manual (2011)*. This important tool was the first standardised training curriculum for fistula surgery and has been a crucial step in the departure from more informal training methods of the past.

FIGO’s pioneering project takes place through Fellows undertaking formal training placements in established training centres, followed by intermittent coaching visits by trainers in Fellows’ home facilities to gradually and methodically build their skills in fistula surgery and care.

The *Global Competency-Based Fistula Surgery Training Manual* and the Training Initiative² have evolved into successful and impactful multipartner interventions with considerable global reach, and continue to make a vital and increasing contribution to narrowing the treatment gap.

About the New FIGO Fistula Surgery Manual

Following years of regular utilisation and extensive feedback from users, including Fellows, trainers and partners, it became evident that the *Global Competency-Based Fistula Surgery Training Manual* needed to be updated and adapted in line with the evolving and new demands of fistula surgery training.

The manual has been collated, developed and edited by the Training Initiative’s Expert Advisory Group of fistula surgeons, who each contributed to the writing and development of specific sections, in close collaboration with the project team. Acknowledging that surgical techniques and practices vary, where there have been slight differences of expert opinion, consensus of the compilation team has been sought. The manual also contains a range of new surgical techniques, illustrations, references to new publications and key learning resources.

The FIGO Fistula Surgery Training Manual continues to form the foundation of the Fistula Surgery Training Initiative, but is also freely available for use by the broader fistula community. Irrespective of

¹ www.figo.org/what-we-do/obstetric-fistula/fistula-surgery-training-initiative

² G. Slinger, L. Trauvelter, A. Browning, A. Rane. Out of the Shadows and 6000 Reasons to Celebrate: An Update from FIGO’s Fistula Surgery Training Initiative. *Int J Gynecol Obstet* (2018).

how training takes place, the manual should only be used under the close supervision of an expert fistula surgeon.

It is absolutely essential for every surgeon to ensure that patients are at the heart of their work, which includes only carrying out repairs that are within the surgical abilities of each specific surgeon, and otherwise arranging an appropriate referral.