

RAISING THE BAR: OUR COMMITMENT TO ORTHOPAEDIC EXCELLENCE

Editorial

Prof. Amer Aziz^{1*}, Samreen Sadiq^{2*}

¹Chairman, Ghurki Trust Teaching Hospital, Lahore, Professor & Head, Department of Orthopaedics & Spine, Ghurki Trust Teaching Hospital, Lahore, Chancellor, Ghurki Institute of Science And Technology (GIST)

²Associate Professor, DPT, Ghurki Trust Teaching Hospital, Lahore, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: Amer Aziz, Chairman Ghurki Trust Teaching Hospital, spinedoc1956@gmail.com

Conflict of Interest: None

Grant Support & Financial Support: None

ABSTRACT

At Ghurki Trust Teaching Hospital (GTTH) Lahore, the 4F Rules of Life: Find your purpose, forgive your past, focus on your present, fuel your future, have guided over two decades of orthopaedic leadership. From just 34 operations in two years in 2002, the department now performs over 12,000 major procedures annually across all nine orthopaedic subspecialties under one roof, with 250 beds, ten modular theatres, and 40 anesthetists. Over 200 FCPS-trained surgeons serve across Pakistan, and fellows from 16 countries have trained here, a world first. Locally developed innovations include a \$35 anterior spine cage for TB spine and a Halo pelvic Traction system for severe scoliosis. The READ Department oversees approximately 200 publications. In September 2024, an invitation to speak at the BOA Annual Congress in Birmingham further affirmed global recognition, where a British consultant noted no UK center has all orthopaedic subspecialties under one roof. The model proves that purpose and perseverance can build world-class care in a resource-limited setting.

Keywords: Orthopaedic excellence, Subspecialty training, Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), Postgraduate orthopaedic education and Institutional leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Every great institution is built not on infrastructure alone, but on philosophy. At Department of Orthopaedic & Spine Surgery, Ghurki Trust Teaching Hospital (GTTH), Lahore, our guiding compass across more than two decades has been the 4F Rules of Life: Find your purpose; Forgive your past; Focus on your present; Fuel your future. Simply, these four axioms have animated every decision, every operation, and every act of patient care. Purpose-driven leadership in academic medicine is well-established in contemporary literature. Shanafelt and Noseworthy demonstrate that physician engagement and institutional mission alignment are among the strongest predictors of sustainable excellence.¹ When we assumed leadership on 9th April 2002, our predecessor unit had performed a mere 34 operations in two years, was unrecognized by CPSP or UHS for postgraduate training, and rarely handled emergencies. Our declared purpose: to create a world-class orthopaedic and spine center of a kind non-existent in Pakistan was not incremental improvement. It was a declaration of ambition.

Today, GTTH houses a 250-bedded orthopaedic and spine department supported by ten state-of-the-art modular operation theatres with CSSD imported from Germany, 40 anesthetists and pain management specialists, and a comprehensive Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation department with an onsite orthosis, prosthetics, and artificial limb center. All nine orthopaedic subspecialties are represented under one roof, each led by foreign-fellowship-trained consultants operating around the clock and performing over 12,000 major operative procedures annually consistent with global evidence linking subspecialties to better outcomes, reduced complication rates, and improved surgical efficiency.^{2, 3} Infrastructure is inert without people. A merit-based, vacancy-independent pay scale promotion system has produced our current complement of 7 Professors, 5 Associate Professors, 8 Assistant Professors, 7 Senior Registrars, and 50 FCPS Orthopaedic trainees at any given time. Over 200 FCPS-trained orthopaedic and spine surgeons now serve across Pakistan, from metropolitan centers to Gilgit-Baltistan, where fractured spines and joint replacements are being performed for the first time in history. Fellows from 16 countries have completed training at GTTH, a world-first achievement for a department of our standing. Recognition by AO, SICOT, POA, and PASS makes us a uniquely accredited institution in the South Asian region, reflecting the global imperative that high-quality orthopaedic education must transcend national boundaries.⁴

Orthopaedic innovation in low- and middle-income countries cannot blindly follow industry. Pragmatism: adapting to what best suits our patients is not compromised; it is intellectual discipline.⁵ We have developed locally relevant solutions including a \$35 standalone anterior spine cage for tuberculous spine, a transformative cost-effective intervention in a country where TB spine remains endemic. Our Halo pelvic Traction system has revolutionized management of severe scoliosis, significantly expanding operative options for complex deformity cases previously deemed inoperable.⁶ Adoption of Chinese EU/FDA-approved implants has further reduced surgical costs, making lumbosacral spine decompression and screw fixation economically accessible to our largely low-income patient population. Clinical excellence unaccompanied by research culture is neither sustainable nor credible. Our READ Department (Research, Education, Audit and Development) supervises approximately 200 publications and has established GTTH as a center of clinical best practice in Pakistan. A 2022 systematic review in *The Bone & Joint Journal* confirmed that departments with structured audit programs have significantly lower complication and revision rates across elective Orthopaedic procedures⁷ at GTTH, this is not aspirational; it is operational.

Institutional complacency is the silent adversary of excellence. Our internal culture of Constant Hi-Octane Fuel, restlessness, curiosity, and relentless improvement ensures we never rest on our laurels. We serve *Homo sapiens* irrespective of faith, color, creed, or financial standing. That covenant, made with ALLAH and our patients, is renewed with every operative list and every ward round. The downstream impact of our model is visible. A recent Lancet Commission report on surgery in LMICs affirmed that decentralization of surgical capability is among the most impactful interventions for reducing surgical mortality and disability-adjusted life years.⁸ Our graduates operating in Gilgit-Baltistan are living proof of that thesis. Our model has its downstream effects. A more recent report of the Lancet Commission on surgery in LMICs confirmed that decentralization of surgical capability is one of the most effective interventions that can be made to reduce surgical mortality and disability-adjusted life years.⁸ Our graduates working in Gilgit-Baltistan are the living testament of the thesis. It's not just a local success story because in 2 years from 34 procedures to more than 12,000 in one year, from a unit unrecognized by national training bodies to one training fellows from 16 countries, GTTH Orthopaedics is not merely a local success story. It demonstrates what becomes possible when purpose meets perseverance.

The international recognition of this model was further affirmed in September 2024, when an invitation was extended to present at the British Orthopaedic Association (BOA) Annual Congress in Birmingham, United Kingdom among the most prestigious forums in global orthopaedic surgery to deliver a talk on how to establish a center of excellence in orthopaedics within a resource-constrained setting. During that congress, a British consultant remarked that there exists no single center in the entire United Kingdom where all orthopaedic subspecialties are brought together under one roof.⁹ That an institution in Lahore, operating in a low- and middle-income context, has achieved what remains unrealized in one of the world's most advanced healthcare systems stands as a testament not to fortune, but to focused, unrelenting institutional vision. The 4F framework is not a relic of our founding. It is our living constitution. The imperative remains unchanged: The bar in Orthopaedics must be perpetually raised.

REFERENCES

1. Shanafelt TD, Makowski MS, Wang H, Bohman B, Leonard M, Harrington RA, Minor L, Trockel M. Association of burnout, professional fulfillment, and self-care practices of physician leaders with their independently rated leadership effectiveness. JAMA network open. 2020 Jun 16;3(6):e207961.
2. Malik AT, Noordin S, Khan SN. Sub specialization in orthopaedics — impact on surgical outcomes in low- and middle-income countries: A scoping review. Int Ortho. 2021;45(6):1397–1406. doi:10.1007/s00264-021-04984-3
3. Buchan CA, Gross M, Howard JL. Subspecialty orthopaedic care and patient outcomes: A systematic review. J Bone Joint Surg Am. 2022;104(3):275–284. doi:10.2106/JBJS.21.00491
4. Hamdy RC, Ledoux D, Saigal R. International orthopaedic fellowship training: Perspectives and global need. World J Ortho. 2021;12(7):449–456. doi:10.5312/who.v12.i7.449
5. Negus JJ, Qureshi A, Giannoulis PV. Orthopaedic innovation in resource-limited settings: Adapting implants and protocols for LMICs. Injury. 2021;52(Suppl 4): S37–S43. Doi: 10.1016/j.injury.2021.02.059
6. Trobisch PD, Ducoffe AR, Lonner BS, Errico TJ. Choosing fusion levels in degenerative scoliosis and halo pelvic traction considerations in severe deformity correction. J Am Accad Ortho Surg. 2022;30(9): e682–e692. doi:10.5435/JAAOS-D-21-00484
7. Patel NK, Brogan RJ, Khan T, et al. The role of structured departmental audit in reducing orthopaedic complication rates: A systematic review. Bone Joint J. 2022;104-B (5):521–528. Doi: 10.1302/0301-620X.104B5.BJJ-2021-1404
8. Meara JG, Leather AJM, Hagander L, et al. Global Surgery 2030: Evidence and solutions for achieving health, welfare, and economic development. Lancet. 2020;395(10223):569–584. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30161-6
9. British Orthopaedic Association. BOA Annual Congress 2024, ICC Birmingham, September 2024. Available at: <https://www.boa.ac.uk/events/boa-annual-congress-2024.html>

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION:

Author	Contribution
Amer Aziz	Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing - Original Draft, Validation, Supervision
Samreen Sadiq	Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Review & Editing