

APLS in Trinidad – Our First 10 Years

Ian Sammy and Joanne Paul

November 2013 marked 10 years of APLS teaching in Trinidad and Tobago. The idea of bringing the APLS course to the Commonwealth Caribbean was first conceived of by Ian Sammy when he was a consultant in Emergency Medicine in Manchester. At the time, he was an active APLS instructor with the ALSG and saw the great potential benefits of the course in Trinidad (his home country). Trinidad already had a history of hosting life support courses, with the ATLS first introduced in 1986 and ACLS introduced by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia in 2001.

In 2002, Ian returned to Trinidad as a lecturer in Emergency Medicine and initiated the process of introducing APLS to Trinidad. While there was great enthusiasm for the course among senior paediatricians and intensivists on the island, it took nearly two years to negotiate the logistics and find the money to host the first course in November 2003. This first course was a 'train the trainers' initiative, facilitated by three senior instructors from the UK (Aruni Sen, Fiona Jewkes and Russell Perkins). In addition, we were privileged to have Sue Wieteska as our course coordinator. We must acknowledge the University of the West Indies St Augustine (UWI) and British Petroleum Trinidad and Tobago Ltd (BPTT) for providing the financial support for the course, including airfare and accommodation for our UK faculty as well as funding for all educational material.

Our first course was held at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, from 25th to 27th October 2003. Participants included senior medical staff from paediatrics, anaesthesia, paediatric emergency medicine and paediatric surgery. This group of 12 then proceeded to complete their instructor course and finally taught their first provider course under the supervision of our UK colleagues. Interestingly, Joanne Paul (at the time a newly appointed registrar in paediatric EM at EWMSC) was only accommodated on this course due to the last-minute withdrawal of one of our other candidates.

Just as the ALSG has moved from strength to strength, so has the APLS team in Trinidad. We have moved from defrosting of chicken legs and slabs of meat to IO manikin legs and chest tube manikins. We moved from the instructors doing all the equipment set up and maintenance to now having two administrative officers/equipment personnel and 4 assistants per course. Through it all there has been great camaraderie and the initial set of instructors have retained a close bond. Even more significantly, the care of seriously ill and injured children has improved, not just in the tertiary centres but also in our peripheral hospitals.

Since our first course, we have continued to expand and develop, teaching at least three courses per year in Trinidad, as well as courses in Tobago and Barbados. The APLS is a compulsory requirement for completion of the Diploma in Emergency Medicine, the DM in Emergency Medicine and the DM in Paediatrics. Many of our recently graduated EM specialists were also selected and trained as instructors. The Faculty now consists of 32 local and regional instructors. They represent a broad mix of professionals, including physicians and nurses, from paediatrics, emergency medicine, paediatric surgery, paediatric emergency medicine, anaesthetics/ICU and paediatric orthopaedics. Instructors include senior clinicians from Trinidad, Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica and the United Kingdom.

In 2006, Dr Paul left Trinidad to pursue fellowships in Paediatric Emergency Medicine in Australia and Canada. Upon her return, she accepted the directorship of APLS in Trinidad and has worked tirelessly to continue to improve the course locally and to disseminate it to other Caribbean islands.

In 2008, the need for a more basic course for registered nurses and other health professionals was acknowledged, and the one day PLS course was introduced. This course caters for registered nurses (many of whom then go on to attend the full APLS course), enrolled nurses and other health professionals who work closely with children. This has been a highly popular course with nursing staff and junior doctors, and has gained financial support from our Health Authorities, who see it as a cost-effective way of providing high quality paediatric resuscitation training to front line staff within our public hospitals.

To date we have trained 500 APLS providers and 200 PLS providers. Future endeavours include the introduction of the two day recertification course to Trinidad and further expansion of the APLS to other Caribbean Territories, particularly those that support postgraduate training in Emergency Medicine.



APLS Instructors, Trinidad 2010. 2nd from right (front row) – Joanne Paul; 3rd from right (front row) – Ian Sammy