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INVITED EDITORIAL

Overcoming Challenges and Barriers to ATLS: Lessons from Kosova

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Since its inception in 1978, Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) was rapidly recognized as a course that can impart essential knowledge for the early care of any injured victim. Its principles of rapidly identifying and treating the immediate threats to life, performing a thorough examination so as not to miss injuries, and rapidly understanding the needs of the patient and the available resources allowing for early decision to transfer if the needs exceed capabilities, have stood the test of time. Additionally, it provides a common language to be able to succinctly communicate the clinical state of the patient, treatments provided, and the response to therapy. For these reasons, the course that originated in the US, has now been promulgated in almost 100 countries, and counting. Multiple studies have demonstrated that it improves the care of the injured, and likely reduces mortality. Also, the skills gained during the course are retained and when needed utilized.

These positive attributes notwithstanding, there are major hurdles that come into play when the course is taken to other regions of the world, with language barriers, differences in patient population and provider attitudes to name a few. Additionally, the course can be extremely costly to sustain specially in low/middle income Countries (LMICs). The current article by Ahmeti et al, has carefully evaluated these challenges through the process of promulgation of ATLS in Kosova. They describe their extremely thoughtful approach and the process of learning from each course they conducted to make the next one better. They overcame the language barrier by a careful translation of the course material before conducting the second course that helped tremendously. Second, understanding the differences in attitude towards courses in general, they provided pre-course instructions as to what will be expected, again making the second course run much more smoothly. To address sustainability and cost, they rapidly trained local educators, and developed partnership with local stakeholders. It is to their credit that they are on track to subsidize 80% of the cost through local partnerships leaving only 20% to be borne by the individual students. The article is a valuable addition to the ATLS literature and should be a must read for the ATLS leaders in terms of how ATLS can be taken to LMICs and be sustainable, and also a must read for others planning to do the same in other regions of the world.