

XXVIII IFSO World Co

12 September 2025 | Santiago, Chile

# Women for IFSO: The Rocky Road to success



*Prof Lilian Kow OAM  
Clinical Director GI Sur  
Flinders Medical Centre  
President IFSO 2019-20  
Past President IFSO-As  
Past President ANZMO  
Adelaide, South Austr*

# XXVIII IFSO World Congress

9-12 September 2025 | Santiago, Chile



## Faculty Disclosure

### Nil

# XXVIII IFSO World Congress

9-12 September 2025 | Santiago, Chile



*Success as a Woman Surgeon: Redefining  
Achievement Through Personal Fulfillment  
Beyond Metrics: What Really Matters*

# Pioneer Women Surgeons

- **Mary Edwards Walker (1832-1919):**
  - first woman to serve as a surgeon in the U.S. Army during the Civil War and was later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor
- **Lilian Violet Cooper (1870-1929):**
  - First female Australian surgeon and a Foundation Fellow of the RACS
- **Averil Mansfield (1937-):**
  - UK's first female vascular surgeon who become the first female professor of surgery

broke barriers → proving that women could excel in surgery

# Pioneer Women Surgeons

## Historical Challenges and Progress

- significant barriers in a male-dominated field
- societal expectations & institutional discrimination
- difficulties in obtaining medical & residency education
- their courage & perseverance opened doors for women surgery: female mentorship & leadership becoming increasingly crucial in fostering future generations of surgeons



# Introduction

Challenge traditional success metrics in surgery

- wealth
- academic output
- hours worked

My personal Journey

Lessons I learned along the way



# Definitions of Success

## *Traditional vs Personal*

We've inherited definitions of success that don't always fit us—or even serve us

### Traditional Success

- Most papers
- Longest hours
- Biggest title
- Richest salary



### Personal Fulfillment

- Impactful mentorship
- Sustainable energy
- Joy in daily work
- Richness in life



# Definitions of Success

## *Traditional vs Personal*

### Traditional Success

- Can lead to burnout, dissatisfaction
- May ignore individual passions, priorities, or personal values
- Often excludes the realities women face (work-life balance, caregiving roles)

### Personal Fulfillment

- Values (compassion, integrity, curiosity)
- Passions (teaching, innovation, patient advocacy)
- Strengths
- Energy-drainers

*“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.” – Maya Angelou*

# Understanding Yourself - The First Step

- Reflect on your values
  - Autonomy
  - Compassion
  - Leadership
  - Creativity
- What energizes you? What drains you?
- When are you most proud?
- What do you want to be remembered for?
- What are your non-negotiables
  - family time
  - research
  - teaching



# Success = Alignment of Passion, Purpose, and Practice



“Balance doesn’t mean doing less—it means doing what matters most.”

# My personal Journey





1400 Sultanate of Malacca

early 15th century, Ming China

Colonisation:

1511-1641 : Portugese

1641-1798 : Dutch

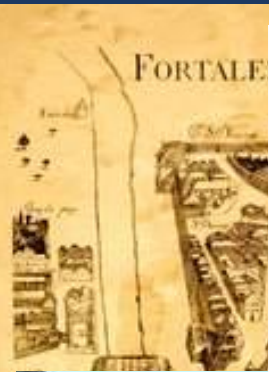
1824-1942 : English

1942-1945 : Japanese

1946: Malaysian Federation







fordveter





Foodveller







facts.co

## States of Australia













**Flinders**  
UNIVERSITY



**BM BS**  
**PhD Neurophysiology**

**Royal Australasian College of Surgeons: FRACS 1996**



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN  
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

Flinders Medical Centre: 1996-1998  
1997

Chief Surgical Resident  
Consultant Surgeon in HPB Surgery

- HPB Surgery
- Endoscopic
- Laparoscopic surgery
- Liver Transplantation
- Bariatric Surgery



ANNALS  
OF  
SURGERY

▶ Ann Surg. 1990 Apr;211(4):419-427. doi: [10.1097/00000658-199004000-00007](https://doi.org/10.1097/00000658-199004000-00007) ↗

**Gastric surgery for morbid obesity. The Adelaide Study.**

[J C Hall](#)<sup>1</sup>, [J M Watts](#)<sup>1</sup>, [P E O'Brien](#)<sup>1</sup>, [R E Dunstan](#)<sup>1</sup>, [J F Walsh](#)<sup>1</sup>, [A H Slavotinek](#)<sup>1</sup>, [R G Elmslie](#)<sup>1</sup>

▶ [Author information](#) ▶ [Copyright and License information](#)

PMCID: PMC1358027 PMID: [2181950](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/2181950/)

Flinders Medical Centre: 1996-1998  
1997

Chief Surgical Resident  
Consultant Surgeon in HPB Surgery

- HPB Surgery
- Endoscopic
- Laparoscopic surgery
- Liver Transplantation
- Bariatric Surgery

1996:

Gastric Band Surgery introduced to  
Australia



ANNALS  
OF  
SURGERY

▶ Ann Surg. 1990 Apr;211(4):419-427. doi: [10.1097/00000658-199004000-00007](https://doi.org/10.1097/00000658-199004000-00007) ↗

**Gastric surgery for morbid obesity. The Adelaide Study.**

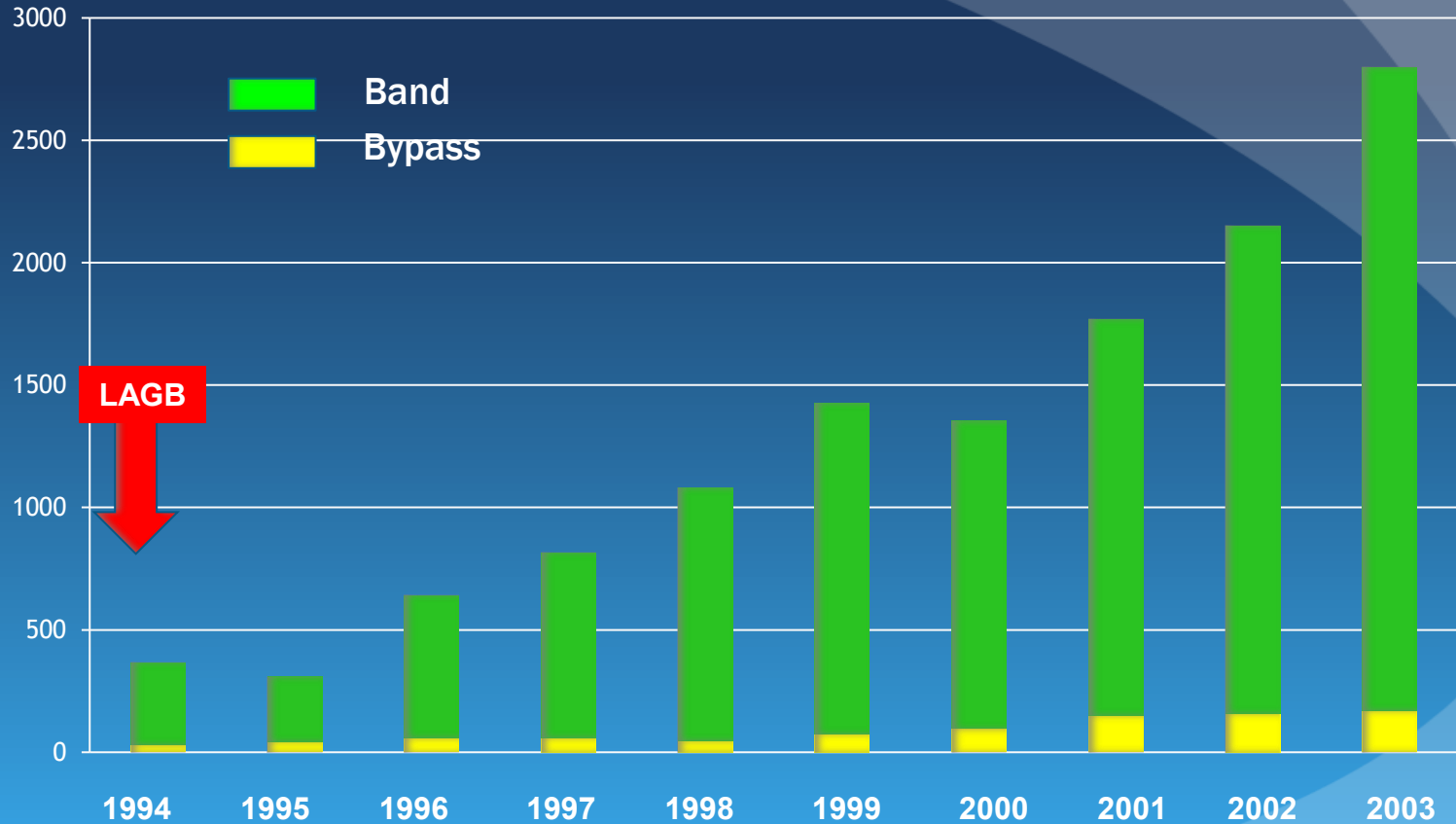
[J C Hall](#)<sup>1</sup>, [J M Watts](#)<sup>1</sup>, [P E O'Brien](#)<sup>1</sup>, [R E Dunstan](#)<sup>1</sup>, [J F Walsh](#)<sup>1</sup>, [A H Slavotinek](#)<sup>1</sup>, [R G Elmslie](#)<sup>1</sup>

▶ [Author information](#) ▶ [Copyright and License information](#)

PMCID: PMC1358027 PMID: [2181950](#)

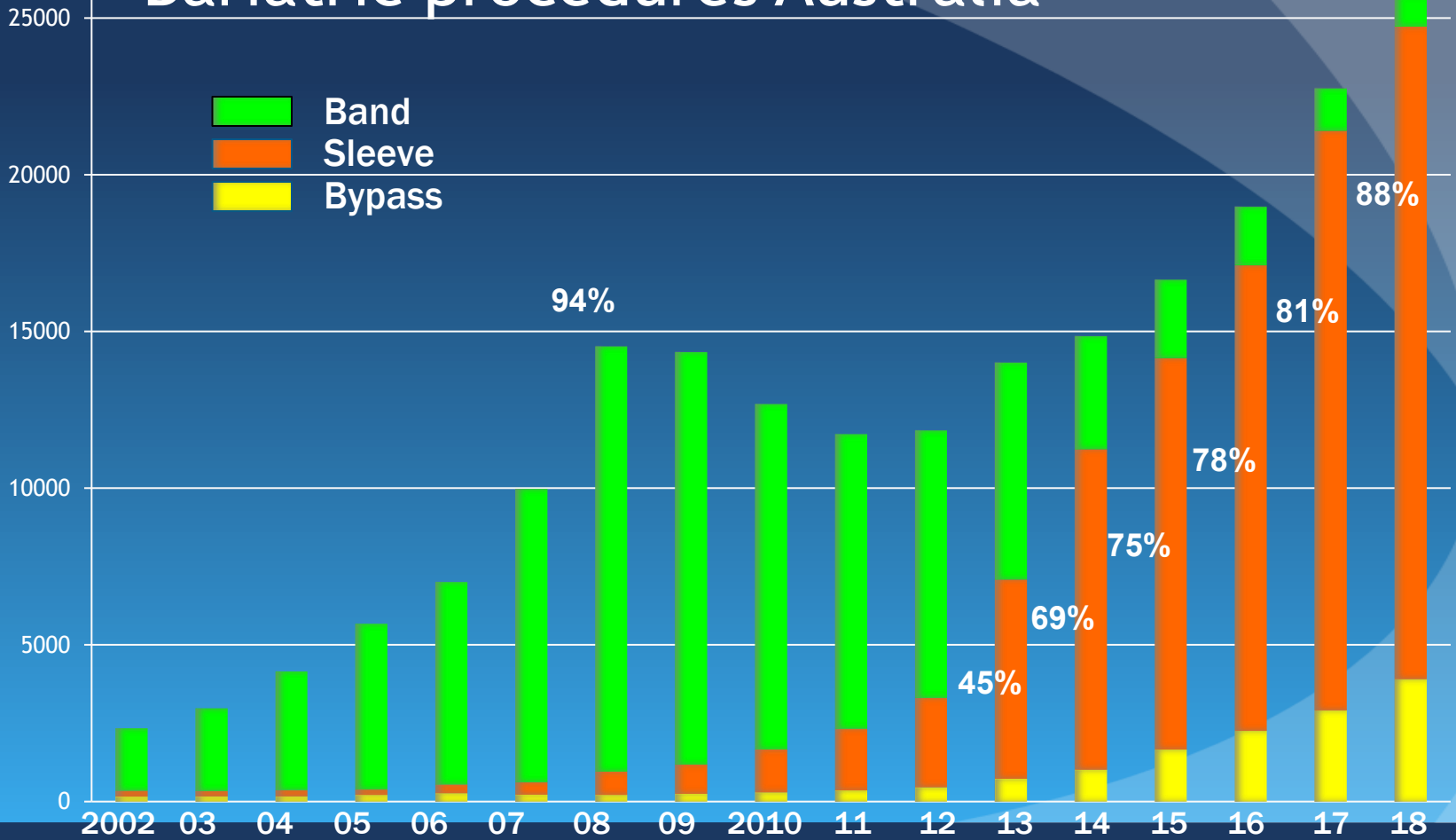


# Bariatric procedures Australia



# Bariatric procedures Australia

- Band
- Sleeve
- Bypass



Flinders Medical Centre: 1996-1998 Chief Surgical Resident  
1997 Consultant Surgeon in HPB Surgery  
- HPB Surgery  
- Endoscopic  
- Laparoscopic surgery  
- Liver Transplantation  
- Bariatric Surgery

1995: Gastric Band Surgery introduced to Australia

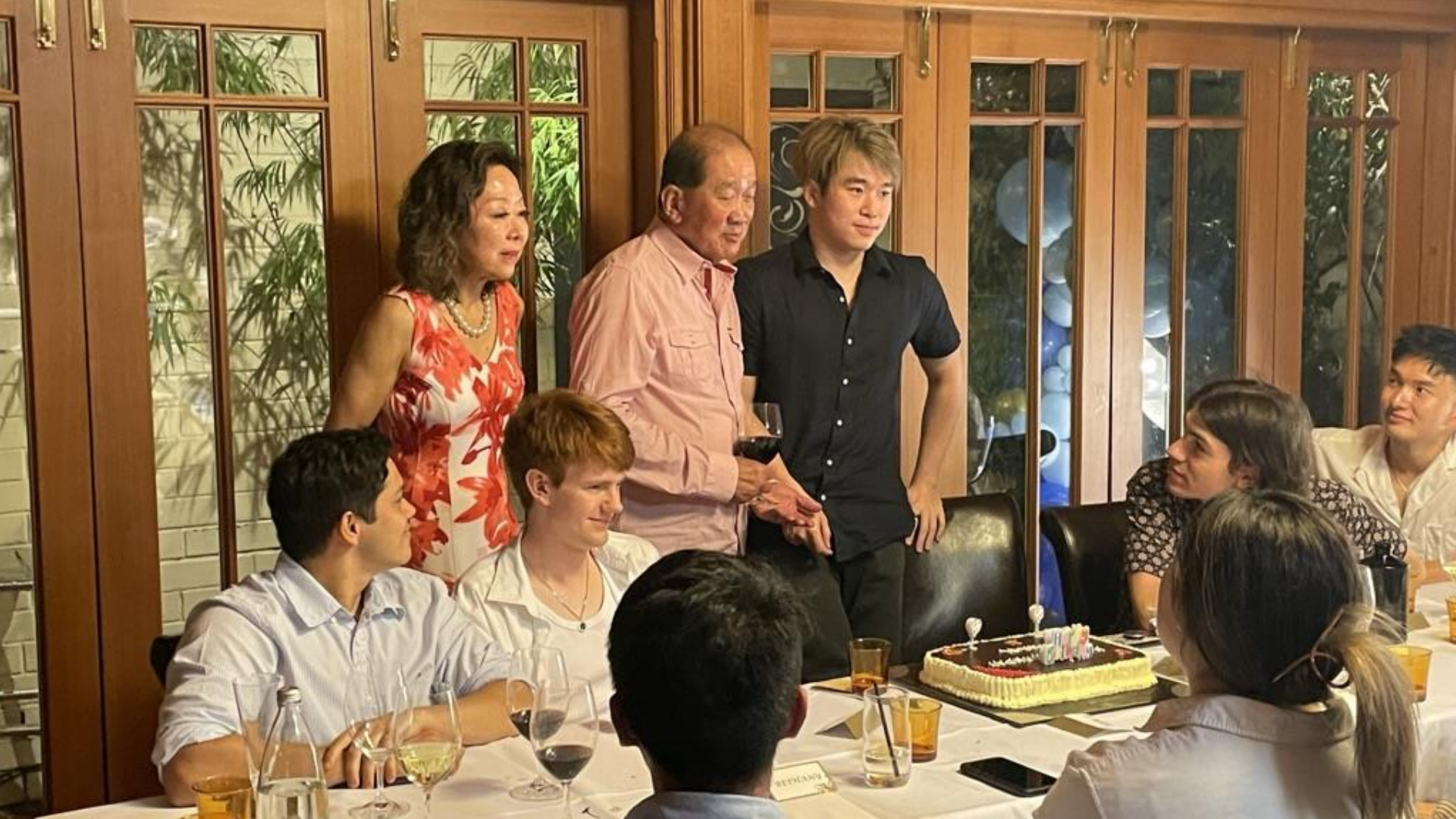
Clinical Director of GI Surgery  
Clinical Professor of Surgery

OSSANZ/ANZMOSS 2003--2009 Secretary and Executive Committee member  
2009- 2012 President

IFSO-APC 2009-2015 Treasurer/Secretary  
2015-2017 President

IFSO 2017-2019 Treasurer/Secretary  
2019-2023 President  
2025-2027 Chair BOT





# What makes a successful career in MBS - what I have learned along the way?

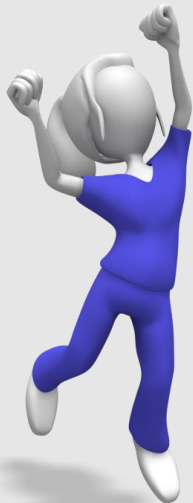
- wearing different Hats

- MBS surgeon:      experts in MBS surgery  
                                 technical skills  
                                 manual dexterity  
                                 clinical judgement  
                                 empathy

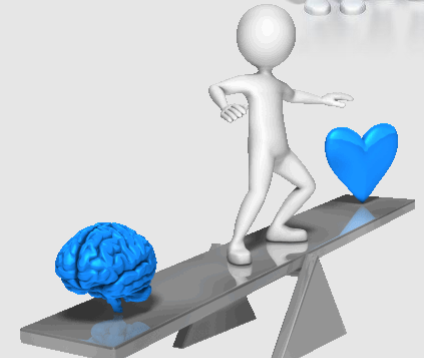
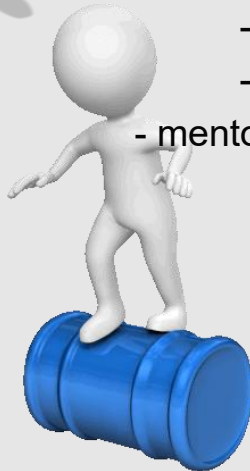
Aphorism: A good surgeon is one who knows how to operate  
A better surgeon is one who knows when to operate but  
the best surgeon is one who knows when not to operate



# What makes us successful in MBS?



- surgeon
- job
- life events
- love
- marriage
- parenthood
- sick babies
- unruly teens
- missed PT meetings
- lost homework
- birthday parties
- championship games/sport
- mentor





## Success in Bariatric Surgery

*Unique Unusual Different Skillful Advanced  
Surgical Skill Can change the life of your patient*

# Privilege to be a woman bariatric surgeon in leadership

- *Find a balance*
- *Work within your ability*
- *Care about your job*
- *Forgive yourself*
- *Family is paramount*
- *Care for your patient*
- *Listen to your patient - they can teach you too*





## Things to remember

- *Appreciate the privilege of being a bariatric surgeon*
- *Work Hard*
- *Accept sacrifices*
- *Care about your job and it will take care of you*
- *Do your best*
- *Family/Friends are important*
- *Be an example to others*



# XXVIII IFSO World Congress

*Thank-you*

