Abstracts

Development of a family medicine specialty training programme in Lesotho

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Abstract

Background Lesotho has a severe shortage of human resources for health. Many young and talented Basotho leave the country each year to attend medical school, but usually they do not return, in part because of the lack of opportunity for continuing education and specialty training in Lesotho. Here, we describe a family medicine specialty training programme (FMSTP), which aims not only to recruit Basotho physicians back to Lesotho but also increase the number of well trained physicians in Lesotho who have the knowledge, skills and commitment to meet the health needs of the people of Lesotho, especially in district hospitals.

Methods The FMSTP accepts Basotho doctors after they have completed medical school and at least 1 year of internship. The first 2 years of the 4 year programme are focused most intensely on clinical training, with registrars working very closely with faculty trainers at their district hospital, and close supervision by the FMSTP faculty and clinical supervisors. Monthly, week-long contact sessions are held at the FMSTP academic centre in Motebang Hospital and students use e-learning in the weeks between contact sessions. The final 2 years of the programme focus on specialty and community-based rotations coupled with a research project chosen by the registrar. Throughout the 4 years, clinical training is integrated with management and public health training to ensure the graduates are equipped to be leaders at a district level.

Findings The FMSTP commenced in January, 2008, and was the only higher education programme in Lesotho to receive full accreditation from the Council on Higher Education in 2015. By 2016, two locally trained family medicine physicians have graduated from the programme and the first graduate is now the FMSTP Deputy Director. Graduates of the programme are recognised and compensated as specialist physicians by the Lesotho Ministry of Health. The Boston University School of Medicine certifies that graduates successfully complete the programme, as outlined in the detailed curriculum documents approved by the Council on Higher Education.

Interpretation Our programme currently has six students enrolled in the programme and an additional three to four students will begin in March, 2016. We are also working with the Ministry of Health to expand our programme to the southern provinces of Lesotho and partnering with medical schools throughout southern Africa to promote Family Medicine training in the region. As the programme continues to expand, success will be measured by the proportion of Basotho medical students returning to Lesotho, retention rates of district physicians, and quality and comprehensiveness of health care provided at district hospitals.

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Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.