

Addressing the burden of cancer and neurological disorders in east Africa: The Royal College of Physicians Medical Training and Fellowship programme

Authors: Jennifer Eastin^A and British Council; East African Development Bank

Aims

The Medical Training and Fellowship (METAF) programme is a four-year project (2016–2020) that aims to increase the early detection, research and treatment of cancer and neurological disorders in east Africa, especially in communities and areas where access to qualified professionals remains a challenge. Through the delivery of a series of clinical training courses, participating physicians will be better equipped to diagnose and manage their patients with common neurological disorders, undertake acute triage of cancer presentation and manage symptoms of cancer within district/regional hospitals. The programme is a collaboration between the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) (technical partner) and the British Council (programme administrator), and is sponsored by the East African Development Bank (EADB).

Methods

Following a partnership agreement between the RCP and the British Council, funds were secured from the EADB. Within year 1 (2016) a needs assessment was carried out in Kampala, bringing together medical leaders in oncology and neurology from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda. During year 1, course conveners were recruited, curricula developed and four intensive training courses delivered with RCP volunteers teaching alongside local faculty. In year 2 (2017), nine training courses were delivered, including the first round of oncology 'cascaded' courses, facilitated by trainers who participated in the previous oncology training of trainers (ToT) workshops, with support from course conveners and RCP volunteers. Quantitative feedback to evaluate learning was gathered in the form of multiple choice tests at the beginning and end of training with test scores compared to evaluate the knowledge change. Qualitative feedback was gathered in the form of written evaluations at the end of each course. Course content is continually amended based on country-specific needs, and participant and faculty feedback.

Results

Since the launch of the programme in 2016, 13 clinical training activities have been delivered; four neurology training courses, five oncology ToT workshops and four oncology cascaded training courses. During year 2, 145 doctors have received training, bringing the total number of doctors trained from across Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda as part of the METAF programme to 224. Participant feedback suggests that over 2,300 clinical staff will benefit from the knowledge gained on the clinical courses through mentoring by course participants at home facilities.

Conclusion

The first year of the programme registered significant strides in addressing the capacity challenges around oncology and neurology in east Africa. Beneficiaries of the training programme came from a wide geographical spread in each country to ensure that improved diagnosis and treatment in cancer and neurological disorders could be deployed outside the urban teaching hospitals.

Feedback from participants, course conveners, visit coordinators and international course faculty indicates significant gains in learning and valuable partnerships were formed. Since inception of the 4-year METAF programme, many lessons have been learned and will be implemented during years 3 and 4. ■

Conflict of interest statement

None declared.

Authors: ^ARCP Global, Royal College of Physicians, London, UK