

Extending the frontiers of knowledge: the report of a Royal College of Physicians-sponsored study visit

Maxwell O Akanbi

ABSTRACT – This is a report of a Royal College of Physicians-sponsored study visit to the UK. The 'Taking knowledge overseas' scheme enables promising, talented and motivated physicians to have access to high-quality postgraduate educational experience early in their career which will stimulate learning and encourage them to share good practice and knowledge on their return home. By the end of 2008, 26 doctors from low-income countries had benefited from the programme.

KEY WORDS: international, knowledge, Royal College of Physicians, travel bursary

Introduction

In June 2007, I was part of a group of health workers gathered in a crowded lecture room at the Jos University Teaching Hospital, Jos, Nigeria, to listen to an eloquent presentation by Professor Simon Taylor-Robinson who was in Nigeria representing the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) as part of the 'Taking knowledge overseas' scheme. The presentation left those gathered with a burning desire to participate in the travel bursary scheme. In September 2007, I was in Blantyre-Malawi as a foundation member of the Pan African Thoracic Society's Methods of Clinical and Operational Research (PATS-MECOR) course. There I met another enthusiastic educator and researcher Dr Stephen Gordon, the meeting organiser and a respiratory physician from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. My chance meeting with these two physicians led to my eventual visit to the UK.

Learning in London

I arrived in London on a cold 5 March 2008 for a four-week study visit. Manuela Claite from the RCP International Office met me at Heathrow airport and provided final details of my trip, including bus passes and train tickets. I quickly settled down and prepared myself for the task ahead. At the 'Delivery of integrated respiratory care' conference the next day I was shocked to hear about the huge gap in healthcare practice between the UK and Nigeria and vowed to use the visit to help improve care back home. Other equally thought provoking lectures on various aspects of respiratory care helped me to pre-

pare for the rest of my trip. I spent the first two weeks of my clinical visit at Imperial College under the supervision of Dr Frances Bowen-Rayner, an astute clinician and teacher, who had mapped out a plan prior to my arrival. This timetable helped me maximise my visit by participating in various activities of the respiratory unit at Charing Cross and Hammersmith Hospitals. It provided the opportunity for my first visit to a sleep and pulmonary hypertension clinic. I also observed Professor Martyn Partridge in his asthma clinic, which gave me the rare opportunity of discussing some challenges in asthma management in resource-limited settings like Nigeria.

The Liverpool experience

After two weeks, I was on the train heading to Liverpool to meet with Dr Gordon. I was given a warm welcome and assigned a workstation at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and a work schedule for the next two weeks. In addition to clinical activities, I attended lectures and participated in on-going research at the tuberculosis (TB) immunology unit. My interest in clinical and epidemiological research in the field of TB and chronic obstructive lung diseases was rekindled and I forged ties with other researchers at the institution. In between the hectic schedule I made time to visit interesting sites in Liverpool making ample use of the tourist information I was given on arrival. The visit came to an end on 5 April 2008 and I found myself heading back to Nigeria with a new vigour to improve my practice, share the knowledge I had acquired and to bring a positive impact to the lives of my patients and colleagues.

Conclusion

Observing medical practice in London and Liverpool has created an opportunity to bridge the gap in knowledge between the UK and Nigeria. With increasing numbers of physicians in low-income countries benefiting from this experience, I believe the RCP has the potential for exerting a positive impact on medical practice, particularly if attachments could last longer and hands-on experience incorporated.

Address for correspondence: Dr MO Akanbi, Department of Internal Medicine, Jos University Teaching Hospital, PMB 2076, Jos, Nigeria 930001.
Email: Maxwell_akanbi@yahoo.com

Maxwell O Akanbi, senior registrar, respiratory medicine, Jos University Teaching Hospital, Jos, Nigeria