

Stemming the medical brain drain in Africa

Africa carries roughly a quarter of the burden of the world's diseases, but only 1.3% of the world health workforce, so the ongoing brain drain remains a concern.



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Although sub-Saharan countries continue to provide government-subsidised medical training, these investments into education are being lost through the emigration of doctors to developed countries.

The College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (Cosecsa) indicates that in sub-Saharan Africa there are just 0.5 surgeons per 100,000 population.

But, the college has shown that investing in education has given African doctors an incentive to remain home and make a positive contribution to their patients' lives. One of the programmes is geared toward getting more women surgeons into operating theatres. It also boasts 94 accredited hospitals with 196 accredited trainers and 350 trainees enrolled.

Recent research showed that 93% of the surgeon graduates from the Cosecsa programme are retained in surgery in the region counteracting the brain drain that occurred in the past.

"Our primary objective is to advance education, training, standards, research and practice in surgical care in this region in order to improve access to surgical care for the neglected surgical patient," says Professor Pankaj G Jani, the President of

Cosecsa in Kenya.

“We deliver a surgical training programme with a common examination and an internationally recognised surgical qualification. Admission to the college is open to all registered medical practitioners who comply with the professional requirements for admission,” he explains.

Meanwhile, a new voluntary code urges governments and private agencies benefiting from doctors immigrating, to provide financial and technological support for developing countries with a shortage of healthcare professionals.

Virtual reality

Dr Bijendra Patel, head of research and content at Medical Realities and consultant surgeon and course director at Barts Cancer Institute in London, suggests using virtual reality as a solution.

“In 2005 I pioneered the curriculum for the world’s first masters in surgical skills and science using virtual reality simulation,” says Patel.

“I am researching and developing courses and curriculum for technology enhanced learning for acquiring surgical skills by simulation, virtual reality and augmented reality. My vision is globalisation of surgery and global transfer of surgical skills.”

Patel says these distance learning programmes place students at the heart of the operating theatre using the latest in virtual reality technology and allows for accelerated training in the rapidly evolving world of surgery.

These programmes are open to any student trainee with a computer, Internet access and virtual reality headsets, and can be conducted on a smart phone.

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