Oral Communication

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Advancing Rehabilitation Medicine in Africa: Insights From a Multinational Fellowship Program

Topic: Education (Medical Student, Residency & Post-Graduate)

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BACKGROUND

Africa faces a severe shortage of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (PRM) physicians, with many countries having fewer than 0.5 rehabilitation professionals per 10,000 people and limited training opportunities. To address this critical need, the International Rehabilitation Forum (IRF) launched a two-year PRM fellowship program in 2018, training physicians from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Namibia, and South Africa. This study evaluates the program's impact on fellows' motivation, clinical practice, access to resources, and the challenges they face within their local contexts.

METHODS

We used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative online surveys and qualitative group discussions to assess demographics, PRM-related activities, collaboration, motivation, confidence in advocating for PRM, patient populations served, and resource availability.

RESULTS

This study evaluated the impact of a PRM training program on participants from Cameroon (n = 1), Ethiopia (n = 3), Ghana (n = 6), and South Africa (n = 16). Of the respondents (54% male, 46% female), over 70% treated stroke (89%), spinal cord injury (77%), traumatic brain injury (77%), and amputee/prosthetic cases (73%) during training. Most worked in outpatient clinics (39%) or acute care hospitals (23%). Half applied new knowledge weekly, while 50% used it monthly. Interprofessional collaboration varied, with 35% collaborating multiple times per week and 58% only a few times per month. While 58% felt motivated to advocate for rehabilitation treatments, only 46% were confident to do so. The program fostered advocacy (100%) and prepared participants for leadership (86.3%), with 59.1% reporting career growth. Limited access to electronic resources (22% had none) and protected learning time (52% lacked it) were noted challenges. Top enrollment motivations included skill enhancement, training future specialists, and pioneering PRM locally.

CONCLUSION

This study examines fellowship learners' patient populations, motivations, and application of training. It highlights advocacy challenges, limited resources, and the need for protected learning time. National-level support can strengthen PRM training, improve workforce development, and pave the way for traditional training programs for future specialists.

Statement of Disclosures

None

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