

Challenges of a General Surgeon working in a District Hospital in Zambia

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This was an opening presentation in line with the theme of the scientific conference “Surgery at the District”. The presenter defined who a General Surgeon was as a doctor with postgraduate training in General Surgery. He or she has knowledge in managing General surgical, Orthopaedics and Trauma, emergency Gynaecology and Obstetrics cases to mention but a few, all this at the district hospital.

The first obvious challenge was the non-availability of trained General Surgeon at the district. Most doctors that find themselves at these hospital as at the level of General Duty Medical Officer or Senior House Officer level, whether they are expatriates Volunteers or non-volunteers. It is hard to find a specialist General Surgeon at the District hospital in countries that have limited resources like Zambia. They find jobs in the “first world” where salaries are attractive.

Those that find themselves at the district have to be Orthopaedic surgeons, Paediatric surgeons, Urologist, Gynaecologist and Physicians to mention but a few. Consultation is non-existence because of poor communication. Transport to Central hospitals is far too costly for the district and the patient. Those patients that find their where to central hospital are usually stranded after treatment and they end up destitute.

Literature to read is not available. Internet services are too costly and non available. If available, too slow to download pictures. The salary of the General surgeon at the district is too low to subscribe to international medical journal.

Schools to send his or her children to are not available. His counterpart in at the Central hospital is privileged to have a wide to choose from for school places.

The presenter suggested that the enumeration for such a surgeon be attractive for him to work in such a place. Conditions of service should look into the disadvantage that such a doctor has and compensate him with better condition of service.

Training of Medical Licentiates would be an alternate. The employees though not doctors are trained to perform emergency surgical operations and refer those that are elective and require specialized surgery to central hospital.

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