

THE WFN VISITING NEUROLOGIST PROGRAM AT THE CHAINAMA COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES IN ZAMBIA - A PERSPECTIVE – DR ALEX MOLL

With a population of about 10 million, Zambia has fewer than 400 doctors practising medicine. The approximately 40 doctors graduating annually from the Medical School at the University of Zambia (UnZa), situated just down the Great East Road from the Chainama College of Health Sciences, are clearly insufficient to meet the demands for medical care in a country where the population is still widely dispersed in sprawling semi-urban and rural areas. The ground transportation system does not allow for rapid transfer of patients to central areas. Although a Flying Doctor system is in operation, this has very limited capacity. The training and deployment of suitably qualified health workers to rural and remote areas of population has been given priority in Zambian government health care planning.

For administrative purposes, Zambia's nine Provinces are further divided into 72 Districts. Distributed throughout the urban and rural areas are approximately 1250 Health Centres. The number and qualifications of personnel at a Health Centre will vary, depending on factors such as the size of the local health district and availability of staff. There may be one or more clinical officers, in addition to nursing and other community health workers. There may be limited Laboratory and X-Ray facility in a few of the larger Health Centres. Many Districts have a Level 1 District Hospital and this may have a Doctor as well as Clinical Officers on staff. There may be capability for some surgical procedures, such as Caesarean Section, basic Orthopaedic and General Surgery and some diagnostic laboratory and X-ray availability. Provincial Level 2 Hospitals have staff with qualifications similar to those at the District Hospitals and may have similar or better diagnostic facilities. Level 3 hospitals exist at the larger population centres of Kitwe and Ndola on the northern Copperbelt and at the capital, Lusaka, where the University Teaching Hospital (UTH) has a number of medical specialty clinics. Specialised hospitals exist for Paediatrics (Davidson) & Psychiatry (Chainama Hills) and there are several Tuberculosis Units and Leprosaria. There are two Computerised Tomographic (CT) scanners, one each in Lusaka and Kitwe.

In addition to the national health network outlined above, further medical resources are provided through various agencies. There are a number of

small private hospitals with limited medical and surgical capabilities, particularly in Lusaka. Mission societies operate hospitals in a number of rural areas. There are many independently funded initiatives in the health sector, aimed at a variety of problems including HIV/AIDS, Maternal and Child Health, Epilepsy and other specific issues.

As with African economies generally, the Zambian economy has been in a poor state for several years and the HIV/AIDS epidemic has placed enormous strains, further draining financial and manpower resources. Health facilities and equipment are old and many diagnostic and treatment services, which would be regarded as basic in developed countries, may not be available. There is co-operation with neighbouring countries to some degree and patients requiring more complex medical services may be flown to South Africa for these, if resources are available for this.

Chainama College of Health Sciences trains Clinical Officers in a three-year program, graduating about 80 of these clinicians annually. The Zambian Minister of Health has indicated its wish that this program should be doubled in size, without any time-table or funding for this increase yet having been announced. A further level of qualification is offered to Clinical Officers who have been working in the community and wish to increase their level of training through a Medical Licentiate training program offered at the College. Chainama College also graduates Environmental Health Technicians (EHT's).

The World Federation of Neurology (WFN) is supporting a program that was initiated through the efforts of Dr. Gretchen Birbeck of Michigan State University Department of Neurology and Ophthalmology. The WFN program will see four Neurologists from abroad coming to Chainama College of Health Sciences over the next year, each for a period of several weeks, with the objective of enhancing the neurologic component of the Clinical Officer training program. These visitors will also act as a neurology resource for any other aspect of neurologic teaching being conducted through the College. This might include the Licentiate program, as well as Continuing Medical Education activities for Staff and graduates of the College. The role of the visiting WFN neurologists in contributing to the educational programs of the Chainama College will vary according to the areas of interest and expertise of the visitor, as well as the needs of the College at the time of the visit.