Introduction to Community-based Medical Education in Rural Africa

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July 2009
Objectives of the module

• By the end of this module, you should be able to:

1. Identify the main components of a health system in a typical sub-Saharan African country
2. Outline how the several components of the system work and be able to assess their functionality
3. Identify your own role, as a student, in that system
Walter Sisulu University School of Medicine

- Walter Sisulu University is located in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. It opened in July 2005 as a result of a merger between three educational institutions and is named for Walter Sisulu, a prominent figure in the struggle against apartheid.
- The School of Medicine is located in Mthatha, in the former homeland of Transkei.
- Most medical and nursing staff are fluent in English.
Area  (Ranked 2nd in SA)
- Total 169,580 km² (65,480 sq mi)

Population  (Ranked 3rd in SA)
- Total 6,906,200
- Density 38 /km² (98 /sq mi)

Ranked 5th in SA

Languages:  Xhosa 83%; Afrikaans 9.6%; English 3.7%

Ethnic composition:  Black 87.6%; Coloured 7.4%; White 4.7%; Asian 0.3%

The Eastern Cape province is in red.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Sisulu_University_for_Technology_and_Science
Walter Sisulu University School of Medicine

• The mission statement of the school is “The School of Medicine is committed to excellence and social responsiveness through the integration of community service into its learning program that involve teaching and research, with a special emphasis on sustainable rural development and in partnership with communities and service providers’
WSU Doctor-training Curriculum

• Curriculum reflects the School’s commitment to the improvement and sustenance of health in the communities it serves.
• WSU utilises a problem-based learning (PBL) approach to medical training
• The problems used in the PBL sessions are the priority health problems seen in the rural South Africa
• More than 10% of the students’ time in the doctor-training programme is devoted to executing community-based activities.
Introduction

- One of the major innovations in medical education is that students should be taught in the environment they are likely to work in.
- They are taught in tertiary hospitals, regional hospitals, district hospitals, primary health-care centers, and in homes.
- These institutions form part of the health system, i.e., institutions whose primary purpose is to improve health.
Introduction

- Tertiary and regional hospitals are often found in cities and large urban areas
- District hospitals and primary health-care clinics are often found in rural areas and are referred to as community-based institutions.
Introduction

• A good proportion of your learning is going to be based in these community-based institutions. You will be offering service while learning in these institutions.

• It is important to know how the system works so that you can fit in, maximize the learning value, and not become frustrated.
Visit to the Primary Health Care Clinic

- The PHC clinic is the point of first contact with the health system for most patients. Consider…..
  - How many patients are in the clinic?
  - Characterize them by age and sex
  - What are the common ailments that bring them to clinic? Are there differences by age and sex?
  - How do patients get to the clinic and how long does it take (mode of travel, distance, time)?
Visit to the Clinic

• What are the expectations of the patients? How long must they wait on average to receive care? Are most problems resolved with the visit or must a large proportion return for test results, consultations, and/or followup care?

• What are the categories and number of health care providers present in the clinic? Are they there full-time or are some of them employed part-time elsewhere?
Visit to the Clinic

• Approximately how many patients are seen in a morning and/or afternoon shift, divided by the number of care providers? Is the average number of minutes per patient per provider enough to allow reasonable quality of care?

• Is there accommodation provided for health care givers within the clinic area?
Visit to the Clinic

• Does the clinic have a laboratory and a dispensary? If yes, are they well supplied or do irregularities in supplies and drugs limit their effectiveness? If no, where do patients get needed laboratory and/or dispensary services?

• For patients receiving a prescription and drugs, how do health care providers inform them as to correct usage?
Visit to the Clinic

- Is there a fee levied for services provided? Is it a single or variable rate, and if the latter, how is that determined?

- What roles can you envisage for yourself, as a student, in the primary health care clinic setting?
  - What activities would have the greatest learning value?
  - What activities could be of value to staff and patients?
  - How can you best minimize demands on staff time?
Visit to a District Hospital

• Most patients visiting hospitals are seen in the district hospital. How far is the nearest town to the hospital?

• How do patients get to the hospital? What is the average distance travelled to get to the hospital? How much time does it take? When must some patients leave home to assure being seen by hospital staff?
Visit to a District Hospital

• Visit the casualty department – what type of patients do you find here? Do they all get to see the doctor? Who decides whether a patient is to see a doctor? What are typical waiting times, and treatment times?

• Visit the out-patient department – what type of patients do you find here? Do they all get to see the doctor? If not, who does see them? Are some told to return on a following day?
Visit to the Hospital

• Visit the wards – what sort of patients are found here? What do the patients think about being admitted to hospital? Do they pay any fee for services rendered?

• What specialist services are available in the hospital? Are they well integrated with primary health care services?

• What para-medical services are available in the hospital?
Visit to the Hospital

• Visit the laundry, boiler room, and sterilizing facility – what role do they play in the normal functioning of a hospital? Are they reasonably reliable or do they experience much ‘down time’ due to problems with maintenance and lack of spare parts?

• Is there accommodation for the hospital staff? Is it adequate? What are the eligibility requirements to use the accommodations?
Visit to the Hospital

• Is there running water in the hospital? Is service reliable? Is the water properly treated?
• What about provision for managing trash and sewage?
  – How does the hospital manage and dispose of ‘sharps’ and supplies that have come in contact with bodily fluids?
  – What special precautions are used to minimize the risk of transmitting HIV?
Visit to the Hospital

• Is electricity available in the hospital and if so, how reliable is it? How often are there ‘outages’ and what impact do they have on hospital operation? Is backup power available?

• How far away, in time and distance, is the nearest school to the hospital?
Visit to the Hospital

• Would you consider working in this hospital after your training? If not, what are the minimum changes that could lead you to change your mind?
  – Working conditions
  – Living and environmental conditions
  – Training and opportunities for advancement
  – Other
Visit to the Traditional Healer

• Traditional systems of health-care are very important in African societies.
• Compare the traditional healer setting with the clinic and hospitals settings
  – Locations
  – Accessibility and convenience
  – Costs? And if a fee levied approximately how much and in what form?
Visit to the Traditional Healer

• What types of patients are found at the traditional healers, and for what types of conditions?
• Do they all get to see the healer?
• What are their expectations, and how do they distinguish between services provided by healers and the formal health system?
Take Home message

• Students must understand the functioning of the health system that is found in their communities and the role of health workers in such a system.
• Students should be introduced to the traditional systems of health care and indigenous efforts that continue to be ignored by the formal health sector.
• Many populations continue to appreciate the availability, affordability and acceptability of traditional health care systems.
Credits

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The Global Health Education Consortium gratefully acknowledges the support provided for developing these teaching modules from:

**Margaret Kendrick Blodgett Foundation**  
**The Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation**

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