IU Collaborates in Innovative Medical Education Program in Kenya

For the past four years, the IU School of Medicine (IUSM), led by its Division of General Internal Medicine, has been involved in a collaborative educational project with Moi University Faculty of Health Sciences (MUFHS) in Eldoret, Kenya. As Kenya’s second medical school, MUFHS possesses an innovative curriculum focused on problem-based learning and community-based health care. The primary goals of the IUSM-MUFHS program are the enhancement of medical education at both institutions and the development of collegial relationships between American and Kenyan medical doctors and students. This educational partnership helps satisfy Moi University’s need for additional academic instructors, while also creating new professional opportunities for IUSM medical faculty, staff, and students.

Counterpart relationships form the cornerstone of the IUSM-MUFHS program. The IUSM Department of Medicine and Pediatrics supports one full-time Indiana University faculty position on-site in Eldoret, Kenya. This IU faculty member receives an appointment to the MUFHS Departments of Medicine or Pediatrics, with his or her counterparts including the Kenyan academic internists and pediatricians of these departments. Since 1990, five IUSM faculty have each spent a year-long term at Moi University.

While in Kenya, each Indiana physician shares the responsibilities of teaching, patient care, and curriculum development at the medical school and the affiliated hospitals and health centers. In addition, the faculty member serves as team leader for the many “short-term” visitors from IUSM. These visitors include IUSM faculty, fellows, and residents, as well as IU medical students who have come to MUFHS for elective coursework. IUSM’s Division of General Internal Medicine is the coordinator of these travel/work schedules, maintaining a house and vehicle for the team leader and family, as well as for IUSM’s short-term visitors.

An additional feature of the IUSM-MUFHS partnership enables IUSM residents of the Internal Medicine and Pediatrics training programs to take an eight-week elective in Eldoret under the supervision of the IU team leader. While at Moi University, the residents’ responsibilities include patient care, teaching, and clinical research activities in the District Hospital and health centers, and participation in the medical school’s urban and rural community outreach programs. While in Kenya, IUSM residents establish collegial relationships with the junior Kenyan doctors, as well as experience the versatility and dynamism of academic general internal medicine and pediatrics. Since 1990, over thirty IUSM residents have chosen elective rotations in Kenya. Virtually every one rated MUFHS as the premier experience of their residency training.

As a new medical school with its first class matriculating in 1990, Moi University’s medical students have yet to begin their clinical rotations. Due to the lack of Kenyan student counterparts, only three IUSM students have been able to take clinical electives in Eldoret. By late 1994, however, the IUSM-MUFHS program should be able to accommodate up to twelve senior IU students each year. In preparation for this new opportunity, students on the IUSM campus have formed an international health interest group and have begun communicating with their MUFHS student counterparts.

The majority of IUSM faculty participating in the IUSM-MUFHS project are from the Division of General Internal Medicine. However, additional IUSM departments and divisions have played a significant role. The Department of Pediatrics has contributed both faculty and financial support, while faculty in the Division of Infectious Diseases have initiated, with their Kenyan colleagues, a major research effort in the area of sexually transmitted diseases. IUSM’s Division of Gastroenterology, Department of Pathology and Toxicology, and Department of Pharmacology have each contributed to Kenyan faculty development in Kenya and Indiana. Practicing internists from throughout Indiana recently traveled to Eldoret to participate in MUFHS teaching and service activities.

The IUSM-MUFHS program provides an important affirmation of Indiana University’s commitment to the world community. Although the United States’ attention has been turning away from sub-Saharan Africa, the IU School of Medicine believes more U.S. medical schools should be working in Africa. The success of the IUSM-MUFHS educational partnership reveals the promise such collaborative projects hold for the development of tomorrow’s medical leaders, both within Africa and the United States.