

Contemporary Issues in Postgraduate Medical Education in Nigeria: A Trainees' Perspective

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Introduction

In the last 10 years, the desire to obtain postgraduate medical education can arguably be said to have acquired the status of being called a conventional wisdom among young medical doctors, what with the improvement in the pay of doctors in government employ, especially those engaged by the tertiary health centres. The surge in the numbers of intending trainees has understandably exposed the inadequacies of placement opportunities and of the facilities available for training in the accredited centres. The need to explore issues surrounding the matter is clearly called for in a forum such as this one at this point in time

Postgraduate medical education has been known all over the world to promote the standards of medical practice by improving clinical skills and competence. In Nigeria, there are 2 bodies (West African College of Physicians/Surgeons and National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria) that are recognised as the certifying bodies saddled with the responsibilities of conducting examinations.

Access and Placement for Residency Training

At the present time, accredited centres for postgraduate training are few and the available placement opportunities inadequate when compared to the number of new medical graduates each year and there is a break-neck competition for the limited spaces available. The selection process into the training programmes has also in recent years been progressively influenced by factors other than merit only. Owing to pressures, many a hospital has ended up employing more resident doctors than their facilities can reasonably cope with and this clearly has an adverse effect on the training process.

Adequacy of Training Facilities and Opportunities

Most of the institutions taxed with training resident doctors are not adequately equipped to do so. They lack the necessary facilities required and are poorly funded. The few facilities available are over stretched and cannot meet the demands of the trainees. There is also a lack of opportunities for further specialised

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training when this is called for. Scarcity of financial resources is often cited for failure to give the needed support for resident doctors to attend training courses that will further enhance their knowledge and practice.

Assessment and Advancement

Residency training is accredited by 2 bodies in Nigeria with the award of a fellowship on completion of the program. The program involves sets of examinations at different stages of the program. One of the major problems that has plagued postgraduate medical education in Nigeria is the lack of adequate information to trainees. Many trainees are not aware of any training curriculum for their speciality and do not know what the examination entails. The Revision and update courses have not helped in this respect as most trainees simply see them as a necessary for accreditation to enable them sit for the exams. The cost of the examinations to the candidate has progressively risen in recent years and sponsorship opportunities are restricted to only one attempt at the examinations.

Standards of Training

Maintaining standards of training is difficult in present day Nigeria. Reasons for this are many and some of them have been mentioned above. Accreditation of training institutions remains problematic and is inappropriately shouldered by the certifying bodies. Dedicated funding is not assured for the postgraduate training committees and many of the training centres are distractedly engaged in measures aimed at surviving precarious and unreliable funding and spending cuts by the central government.

Administration and Legislation

The Federal Health Authorities continue to pay only ceremonial attention to the training centres and certifying bodies. The National Assembly's select committees on health have yet to show keen interest in the medical specialist needs of the country. Enabling laws are yet to be upgraded and new ones aimed at enhancing funding and performance are yet to be instituted.

The future of Postgraduate Medical Education in Nigeria

Postgraduate Medical Education is obviously in its infancy in Nigeria. There is need to focus governmental and legislative attention to provide a contemporary framework for its sustenance and development. There is an obvious and crying need for investments in infrastructure as well as opportunities for all suitably qualified graduates to get training placements within the fledgling Residence Programme of the country.

On their part, the trainers, accrediting and certifying bodies need to update the curricula and reform the procedures and methods so that the training programmes can be brought into line with international standards.

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