

Cancer Diseases Hospital, Lusaka – Sussex Cancer Centre Link

Background

There are an estimated 18 million new cancer diagnoses in 2018. Cancer is the second leading cause of death globally (accounting for about 1 in every 6 deaths), of which approximately 70% occur in low- and middle-income countries. Growing international concern at the paucity of cancer services in these resource poor settings has led to all United Nations Member States to adopt Sustainable Development Goals with the aim to reduce cancer-related deaths by a third in the next 15 years. This ambitious new target will not be reached by prevention alone and the comprehensive scale up of cancer treatment services is essential. Partnerships between well established and emerging cancer centres are key for capacity development by filling trainer gaps, providing mentorship and reducing professional isolation in new centres.

Brighton and Sussex Medical School established the Lusaka Link 11 years ago to provide education and clinical support in the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka, Zambia. Under the auspices of Lusaka Link, the Sussex Cancer Centre and the Cancer Diseases Hospital (CDH) have agreed to a training partnership to build a specialised clinical oncology human resource by the creation of a cost effective and sustainable programme. The CDH is a government funded modern centre situated in the capital city Lusaka and serves the whole of Zambia. In 2017, CDH treated approximately 2500 new patients, which is about quarter of estimated cases nationwide. It provides care for all adult and paediatric malignancies, except for leukaemias. CDH has good radiotherapy and chemotherapy capability, making it an ideal training centre. There is a well-developed radiographer training programme, supported by the IAEA, that takes students from across Africa.

To provide a comprehensive cancer service across Zambia an estimated 120 clinical oncologists will be required. Currently Zambia only has 7 clinical oncologists. Prior to February 2018, there was no local training programme in clinical oncology in Zambia and all specialists were expensively trained in South Africa. Establishing a local training program in Clinical Oncology was vital to reduce the costs of training. The Curriculum, approved by the Zambia Colleges of Medicine and Surgery, is a four-year postgraduate training programme. It is hoped that such an intervention will be sustainable and there will be a high chance of the Zambian health service retaining the new specialists.

Initial meeting

An initial meeting has taken place in Zambia. This meeting defined the external elements required to deliver high quality training to produce a critical mass of clinical oncologists to ensure future independence. The CDH provides an excellent setting for a partnership of this type; the Zambian training structure mirrors that of the UK's Fellowship in Clinical Oncology (FRCR) and the facilities are well developed. The long-term partnership to build clinical oncology capacity in Zambia will involve training through telemedicine and face-to-face lectures, continuous clinical assessment similar to the RCR's workplace based assessments, mentoring, exam setting and examining. Reciprocal visits would open opportunities of a wider understanding of professionalism, ethics, health systems and governance.

Proposal

In the short term, we propose to recruit RCR Fellows to critique examination papers, volunteer as external examiners and be part of a telemedicine training programme. This aim aligns well with the key founding aims of the RCR's International Committee.

It is possible that, in the future, RCR Fellows would be recruited to lecture on modular courses of one-week duration in Zambia, to develop mentorship roles and assist with training of trainers' courses. Furthermore, UK based clinical oncology trainees could benefit from an OOPT Fellowship in medical education or clinical service development. The Royal College of Anaesthetists has a higher training module mapped to work-based assessments for low income settings, bringing both credibility and safety to overseas work for their trainees. Funding (external to the RCR) would be sought to fund travel, administration and teaching aids. Similar schemes, supported by the Crisp Report, have been hugely beneficial to training and retention.

We propose to recruit volunteers through the RCR International Committee website and forum. The detail of the current request is as follows:

- (1) To write clinical exam questions aligned to Fellow's speciality
- (2) Sit the Zambian training fellowship basic science exam to enable critique of questions
- (3) Ascertain interest in volunteering to teach lectures via a telemedicine link
- (4) Recruit volunteers to provide face-to-face training workshops in clinical oncology and radiology (currently self-funded)
- (5) Recruit volunteers to act as external examiners (currently self-funded)
- (6) Consider involvement in fund raising

For all interested persons please contact me on the email below.

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