

Directors of Clinical Services Meeting

Réunion des directeurs des services cliniques

GOUVERNEMENT DE LA
REPUBLIQUE DE LA
VANUATU
MINISTERE DE LA SANTE



GOVERNMENT
OF THE
REPUBLIC OF VANUATU
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CURATIVE & HOSPITAL SERVICES

Overcoming Barriers to Medical Education in Vanuatu Ministry of Health

1. BACKGROUND

Vanuatu has in the past sent students to undertake the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) program in Fiji, PNG, New Zealand and Australia. However, in 2008 Vanuatu began sending its medical students to countries outside the Oceania region particularly to non-English speaking schools in China, Cuba and most recently Georgia. In total there are 35 interns that are foreign-trained. Due to the different standard in training and different languages that they are being taught in, this has made internship training difficult for our local doctors. With the uncertainty that has existed around regional institutions such as Fiji National University (FNU) and University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) accepting these students into postgraduate studies, Vanuatu has not been able to send doctors for specialist training.

2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

2.1 Progress

In 2015, Vanuatu received its first few graduates from Cuba and China. In order to ensure these medical interns receive an adequate level of quality training, the Pre-Registration Training Committee (PRTC) was established and is still in existence today. The committee is made up of specialists from all major departments (usually the Head of Department). Below are the Terms of reference (TOR):

The Pre-Registration Committee (PRTC) is accountable for:

- 1) Developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Medical Internship program.
- 2) Coordinating and overseeing the workplace-based competencies assessment of new Medical Interns in Vanuatu including logbooks, on-line surveys, written and oral assessments and Continuous Medical Education.
- 3) Making recommendations regarding the use and development of infrastructure and technologies to support Medical Intern education and training.
- 4) Establishing Partnerships with local and international education organisations, institutions and individual technical advisors to improve the availability and quality of medical education in Vanuatu.
- 5) Providing support towards the Medical Interns' professional development in line with Government priorities and areas of specialty as well as clinical needs in line with the Ministry of Health's clinical workforce plan.
- 6) Screening and recommending to the Vanuatu Health Practitioners Board new medical graduates prior to commencing medical internship training program.

- 7) Advising the Health Practitioner's Board upon completion of medical internship programme which interns have completed their professional requirements for general registration.
- 8) Advocating for intern welfare where applicable or appropriate

2.2 Achievements

Vanuatu has managed to have a few achievements so far that will help it further develop its work force into the future. Below are some of these achievements:

- 1) Role delineation policy is in place and defines national ideal for health staffing
- 2) Develop partnership with partners like AVI, SPC and WHO to support training
- 3) Recently approved Vanuatu Clinical Training program (VCTP) that has its TOR as below which encompasses the entire clinical workforce and not just medical interns

A. PURPOSE: To provide a high standard of clinical training in Vanuatu.

B. OBJECTIVES:

- 1) Improve the knowledge and skills of doctors, dentists, nurses and other health workers
- 2) Identify and support best practices through research and education
- 3) Advance clinical staff along prioritised career pathways via providing access to training programs that will prepare the staff
- 4) Increase accessibility to high quality healthcare
- 5) Develop and strengthen career pathway for doctors, dentists, nurses and allied staff
- 6) Educational opportunities will be made available in other curative and hospital services.
- 7) Continuing education expectations and opportunities will be implemented for all doctors, nurses and allied staff.
- 8) All programs will receive certification under the Vanuatu Qualifications Authority.
- 9) The VCTP board will deliver regular reports to the Director of Curative and Hospital Services based on review of activities presented to the Board by the Program Administrator.

3. CHALLENGE

Despite the progress in medical education in Vanuatu, there are still additional challenges ahead. These include:

- 1) An anticipated lack of scholarships to support the backlog of doctors awaiting Postgraduate training as they would need to share this with the entire Vanuatu government sector
- 2) Need to strengthen the MoH Human resource management database system to capture relevant data for workforce planning and budgeting purposes.

- 3) No career pathway for nurses, dentists and allied staff. This is greatly needed to guide staff and MOH to plan training needs with alignment to health service delivery for Hospitals. Therefore, due to the lack of these career pathways it would cause staff to leave their appropriate field of training and seek other options, such as in Public Health.
- 4) There is currently no support from the MoH for Continued Medical Education for clinical staff e.g., subscription to Journals or Up to date for example.
- 5) Lack of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points that will guide the health practitioner's board and nursing council with renewal of registration.
- 6) Vanuatu Nursing Council to continuously review and develop nursing educational and clinical nursing standards to guide incountry nursing institutions in the delivery of nursing course programs and overall nursing practice which we hope will be assisted by the VCTP that has been newly developed. Lack of a proper training committee for medical officers, which we hope will be rectified by the VCTP

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

4.1 Recommendations for governments:

Based on what we are experiencing in Vanuatu, we would suggest that our government and others within the region consider the following:

- 1) Avoid sending students to non-regional, non-English medical schools unless they are well accredited and recognised
- 2) Map out a path to success for each trainee, particularly for the non-regionally trained graduates, prior to committing government funds and trainee time
- 3) Identify the barriers that prevent trainees from progressing and provide solutions to address this.
- 4) Work at the national and regional levels to find solutions. Many Pacific Island Countries are in a similar situation
- 5) Develop continuing education programs that encourage learning and skill
- 6) Provide policies that encourage students to develop careers in healthcare
- 7) Think long term. Improvements now take time to see but provide benefit for many years.

4.2 Recommendations for development partners:

Development partners provide key pieces of the solution through mentoring and funding. At the same time, we suggest the following be considered:

- 1) It is difficult for short-term assistance to solve and lead to long-term solutions. Long-term commitments have better impact.

- 2) Funding for education is an investment in independence. Once Pacific Island Countries have the staff to support their own people, there can be less and less reliance on external support.
- 3) There is a significant need for health scholarships to countries like Vanuatu to be able to send doctors, nurses, dentists and allied staff regularly for postgraduate programs.
- 4) Encouragement is needed so that FNU and UPNG can provide ample placements for clinical staff to train for specialist fields
- 5) SPC with other partners like WHO to provide a list of well accredited foreign universities that will assist governments in decision making when sending students to foreign universities.