

Postgraduate medical education and maintenance of professional competence for practitioners in Kuwait

Mohammed A. Al-Jarallah

Postgraduate Medical Education

The past four years have witnessed a marked change in postgraduate medical education in Kuwait with the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization (KIMS) taking a number of important steps aimed at improving its standards. Some of the measures that have been taken are the review of postgraduate training programs by visiting consultants at the invitation of KIMS, revision of curricula of postgraduate training programs, study of the pattern of implementation of postgraduate training programs, and audit and the provision of feedback to trainers and tutors on local training programs. These steps have enabled the quality of the local programs to be elevated so that they match the internationally accepted standards of medical postgraduate training.

The World Federation of Medical Education (WFME) released its Guidelines on Quality Improvement in Postgraduate Education in 2003.¹ This followed the publication of a similar document prior to it, which dealt with undergraduate medical education.² In its efforts to incorporate the WFME recommendations in planning and conducting postgraduate training in Kuwait, KIMS had arranged a series of meetings with the planners of the local programs at which the key issues had been discussed. In addition, the Directors of postgraduate specialty training programs have been informed of the details of the recommendations and specifically requested to give due consideration to the proposals in organizing training in their specialties. The maintenance of the standards in the local training programs, thus, reflects the quality that has been achieved in postgraduate training in Kuwait.

At the beginning of the current academic year of 2004/05, KIMS released a revised

reprint of its *Educational Guide*. The Guide was first published in 2002, and as with the first edition, the reprint appeared both in the traditional print (hard copy) format as well as in its pdf version in the KIMS website. The publication outlines the postgraduate specialty training programs conducted locally, some of which are collaborative ventures undertaken jointly with recognized postgraduate educational institutions abroad. The Guide lists a selection of external websites related to medical and dental specialties and postgraduate specialization. Recent graduates will find this information a useful guide in their choice of postgraduate training and the selection of careers.

Maintenance of Professional Competence

The professional community as well as the general public in many parts of the world now accept that it is essential for members of the various professions to continue to engage in formal educational activities to ensure that they keep themselves abreast of the developments in their respective fields of practice. With the aim of expanding the opportunities available for Continuing Medical Education (CME) and to monitor participation through a formal approach, KIMS launched its CME Program in September 2000. A great deal of work has been done since, both in quality as well as in quantity under the scheme. The program, renamed the Maintenance of Professional Competence (MPC) Program subsequently, has over 5000 practitioners registered in it at present. A major development in the program has been its expansion in 2003 to include pharmacists under its umbrella.

One of the measures of satisfactory completion of CME is reaching the target total of CME credit points that has been specified as the minimum required within the five-year cycle. Medical and dental practitioners are expected to reach a level that is higher than

ex-Minister of Health, State of Kuwait.

Correspondence: Dr. Mohammed A. Al-Jarallah, Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization, 10th Floor, Behbehani Complex, Al-Sharq, P.O. Box 1793, Safat 13018 Kuwait.

the one stipulated for pharmacists. This decision has been based on the fact that the pharmacists have fewer opportunities than the other two groups for undertaking formal CME locally.

A number of measures has also been taken by KIMS to establish collaboration at regional and international levels with other CME authorities. These links with organizations in the GCC, Mediterranean and the North American regions and the UK have created opportunities for reciprocal recognition of CME credits, provided the practitioners satisfy the criteria stipulated under the guidelines.

An important avenue that has opened up during the past few years in the areas of postgraduate and continuing education of health professionals is the wide range of on-line facilities for learning. KIMS has taken extra effort to impress on the health professional community the value and the advantages of using on-line learning. The KIMS website lists many links that help the new graduates in postgraduate education and career choice, while the MPC Program relies on the Internet as the main medium for communication between the CME Center and the practitioners covered under the MPC Program.

During the implementation of the MPC Program it has been observed that a substantial proportion of practitioners are somewhat reluctant to use on-line learning and other similar facilities.³ This is an important issue that needs to be addressed by all concerned. In an era of rapid development of information and communication technology, the State of Kuwait has realized the importance of using the innovations for efficient administration, and the authorities have embarked on a number of measures for e-governance. It goes without saying that the health professional, too, should be ready to make optimum use of the available technological facilities. The decision by KIMS to harness the Internet and on-line learning as a vehicle for administering the MPC Program falls in line with the overall policies of the health services administration. It is up to us as members of the professional community to use the newer technologies appropriately to assist us in continuing education and maintenance of professional standards, as we would do with innovations in our

own medical specialties and subspecialties. The provision of facilities by KIMS for on-line education in the medical specialties contributes to the enhancement of the competence of the practitioner to a great extent, and goes a long way to reassure the general public that the health professionals practicing in Kuwait are actively involved in maintaining professional competence and standards.

Bulletin of KIMS

The *Bulletin of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization*, which is now in its third year of publication, deals with themes of special interest to practitioners in Kuwait, and also to those in the other states in the Arabian Gulf region. Postgraduate education and continuing medical education are two of the important subject areas that are covered by the journal.

An international editorial board assists the production of the journal through auditing and peer review of the journal content. In addition, the *Bulletin* is indexed in the regional indexing databases, and steps have been initiated for it to be included under the indexes that function at the international level.

The *Bulletin of KIMS* is distributed widely in the GCC countries and among educational and scientific institutions worldwide. New graduates joining the health professions community will find a number of sites that will help them in postgraduate education and career choice, while the established practitioner receives the opportunity of browsing, and, where applicable, undertaking CME through a number of useful links.

References

1. World Federation for Medical Education. *Postgraduate Medical Education. WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement*. Copenhagen: WFME; 2003. Available from: URL: <http://www.wfme.org>
2. World Federation for Medical Education. *Basic Medical Education. WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement*. Copenhagen: WFME; 2003. Available from: URL: <http://www.wfme.org>
3. Premadasa IG. CME Program in Kuwait: two years in progress. *Bull Kuwait Inst Med Spec* 2002;1:43-6.