

## Postgraduate specialization in Kuwait: trends and directions for development

### Editorial

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A recent study that was completed at Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization (KIMS) shows the trend in selecting specialties for higher training and specialist qualifications by the Kuwaiti physicians who are undertaking postgraduate training at present. While Family Medicine is observed to be the field that has the highest demand among the specialties for which training is available locally, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics and Surgery appear as highly preferred choices among those for which physicians had been sent abroad.<sup>1</sup> Although only a limited amount of data is available as regards the situation in the neighboring countries in the Gulf, it may be assumed that the pattern in these settings may not be very different from that which exists in Kuwait.

Development of health care infrastructure with respect to the quality and quantity of health personnel workforce needs to be closely related to the vital statistics data on the health problems and disease patterns.<sup>2</sup> As it is unlikely that the number of medical specialists that would be available in Kuwait over the next twenty-year period will be sufficient to match the requirements for providing an effective service,<sup>3</sup> the authorities responsible for the overall policies need to use the available data to the optimum extent and institute a comprehensive strategy to deal with the anticipated situation.

Although the data that is available on the specialties selected for postgraduate training by physicians in Kuwait are somewhat limited, they show that male trainees preferred the specialties of Medicine and Surgery for higher

training, while females opted for Obstetrics & Gynecology, Pediatrics, or Family Medicine.<sup>4</sup> An additional point worth noting is that a number of specialties such as Emergency Medicine, Intensive Care and Physical Medicine do not appear to have attracted an adequate number of postgraduate trainee physicians.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, these specialties will continue to remain understaffed for the near future as far as Kuwaiti specialists are concerned, with the authorities having to rely on the expertise and services of expatriate personnel for providing the required level of services.

It may be deduced that the availability of postgraduate training programs in the home country will encourage physicians to choose these in preference to specialties for which living abroad for long periods is needed. This view is supported by the observation in the aforementioned study that approximately 35% of the trainees in Kuwait had selected Family Medicine for postgraduate training.

Appropriate steps need to be taken to attract sufficient numbers of trainees to the specialties that do not have adequate specialist personnel at present. This would help in correcting any deficiencies that are likely to arise as regards specialist strength in the specialty fields that are under-represented among those that are selected by the physicians currently in postgraduate training.

When the State provides the necessary facilities for postgraduate training for physicians, as happens in Kuwait, it is important that community needs serve as the main determinant of the fields of specialization for which resources are allocated and trainees are directed. A needs analysis of the healthcare services as regards the current and future requirements would help in identifying the priority specialties. Data available on the health and population status of Kuwait show that cardiovascular disease, neoplasia and road traffic accidents are the leading causes of

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death in both sexes. With information on health status and disease patterns serving as the basis, the authorities would be in a position to influence the decisions of prospective postgraduate trainees regarding their choices of fields of specialization, with the aim of improving the number of specialists that would be available for service in the under-represented specialties.

The neighboring countries that come within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as is the case in Kuwait, do not have adequate published data on the choices of specialties by physicians undertaking postgraduate training. As the health problems in all the GCC countries could be considered as somewhat comparable, some of the remedial measures aimed at improving postgraduate training opportunities could be implemented as collaborative undertakings. This would also help in minimizing the expenses that would be incurred if multiple centers were to be established within the GCC countries, each of which has a relatively small population.

It is also important to take into consideration the common cultural heritage and the conservative value systems that exist in the countries in the Gulf region.<sup>5</sup> Although there have been major changes in some countries during the past few decades, on the whole, living for long periods in environments and cultural settings different to one's own is not an attractive option to many postgraduate trainees. Many female physicians would

consider this as an important factor in the choices of their specialties. Opportunities for postgraduate training in the home country or in a neighboring country in the Gulf region need to be developed so that Kuwait and its neighbors could hope to have, within a reasonable period of time, an adequate number of medical specialists in all the important fields of specialization.

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