

Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization: its present position and future directions

Abdul Rahim Al-Zaid

Introduction

Medical education in Kuwait started with the establishment of the Faculty of Medicine of Kuwait University in 1973. Prior to this, Kuwaiti nationals who wished to embark on a career in medicine had to go abroad for enrolling in undergraduate medical education programs. With the evolution of a substantial pool of medical graduates who had been awarded a basic medical degree, the need for providing opportunities for education at the postgraduate level became an important consideration in the early eighties, and the Ministry of Health initiated its scholarships scheme that allowed doctors to go abroad for training at the specialist level. While the Training Division of the Ministry looked after this program at its inception, the realization by the concerned authorities that it needed to be expanded in scope saw the birth of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization (KIMS) in 1984. KIMS now coordinates programs arranged at institutions abroad for specialist training, and locally for postgraduate training as well as for continuing medical education (CME) and continuing professional development (CPD).

Aims and Objectives

KIMS aims to enhance the level of competence of health professionals by providing opportunities for specialist level training and for continuing medical education. To achieve this goal, it formulates the general policy for training doctors and other health professionals in different fields of specialization, and designs and monitors the implementation of specialist and professional training for them.

An additional field of major interest to KIMS is continuing professional development of

health professionals. The institute has initiated a comprehensive scheme for continuing medical education.

Training Programs

The responsibility of fulfilling the role of KIMS as an educational and training institution in medicine at the postgraduate level is shared by the Faculty of Medicine and the sister Colleges of the Health Sciences Center of Kuwait University and the Ministry of Health, which provide the required resources of personnel and material. While the administration and the monitoring of postgraduate training fall within the immediate purview of the specialization committees of KIMS, termed the Faculties, the teaching functions are carried out by the senior academic staff of the University and the specialists of the Ministry of Health.

Internship Training

As in most other countries adopting the system of Western medicine, newly qualified medical graduates are required to follow a basic training program called internship training that makes them eligible for registration to practice medicine. KIMS makes arrangements at selected hospitals in Kuwait for this one-year period of training, which gives an opportunity to the trainees to develop their skills in the major medical specialties as well as in subject areas such as medical ethics and cardiac life support. Two training manuals, *Internship Training—Trainee Guide* and *Internship Training—Trainer Guide*, have been published to assist the trainee and the trainers, the supervisors and the directors of the training programs.

Postgraduate Training

KIMS has established a number of Faculties and Committees in the major specialties in medicine for coordinating postgraduate train-

Vice President, Board of Trustees, Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization

Correspondence: Dr. Abdul Rahim Al-Zaid, KIMS, 10th Floor, Behbehani Complex, Al-Sharq, P.O. Box 1793, Safat 13018, Kuwait, Fax: 965 2410028

ing programs in these fields. These training programs cater mainly to the needs of Kuwaiti nationals. However, enrollment is open to all GCC nationals, and also to nationals of other countries in the Middle East.

Over 600 Kuwaiti trainees have received scholarships arranged through KIMS for training abroad, and have obtained qualifications in the different medical specialties.

In addition to the training opportunities provided at institutions abroad, the Faculties and Committees of KIMS arrange fellowships and specialty training locally in the respective fields. The duration of this training varies from four to five years in the different specialties and sub-specialties, depending on the competencies that the trainees are expected to achieve. Some of the Faculties have collaborative agreements with reputed international institutions in UK and Ireland, USA, Canada, and France and other European countries, which provide opportunities and facilities for learning in their specialties.

Continuing Medical Education

KIMS has launched a comprehensive scheme of continuing medical education (CME) for health professionals in Kuwait, starting in September 2000. The project is implemented through its CME Center, which has been established specifically for the purpose. The CME programs that are being conducted at present target medical and dental practitioners. With the expected improvement of resources and the increased awareness of the scheme among the members of the health professional community, programs would be arranged for the benefit of other categories of health workers in the near future. In planning the programs and conducting the tutorial sessions, the CME Program draws heavily on the resources that are available in the Ministry of Health and the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Dentistry of Kuwait University. International specialists are invited when needed, to collaborate with the local experts. To facilitate coordination among specialties and to ensure congruence with the overall goals of the program when implementing CME activities, KIMS has constituted a CME Council. This body has representation from all specialization committees, and works

closely with the Director of the CME Center in organizing the activities for continuing professional development. The CME Program of KIMS has received accreditation by international professional bodies: Fellows of The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and The Royal College of Pathologists of UK practicing in Kuwait are eligible to submit CME credits obtained by participating in the local activities for the maintenance of certification in their respective Colleges.

Research Unit

The Research Unit of KIMS incorporates the former Medical Research Unit of the Ministry of Health. It is concerned with guidance and monitoring of the evaluation and implementation of health research projects.

Learning Resources

The postgraduate medical library of KIMS and the electronic library service it offers serve health professionals attached to the Kuwait University as well as those serving in hospitals that come under the Ministry of Health. The facility has been expanded to include health professionals attached to institutions in the other countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

The Central Medical Library also acts as the central acquisition and distribution agency, and functions as the apex body of the MEDLINE Network. In addition to providing training in medical information technology on site, the library staff visit the libraries in hospitals, departments and specialized units to support and guide the local librarians.

The Medical Illustration Unit of KIMS provides services in a variety of categories of media for teaching and research activities. These include medical photography, preparation of graphics and transparencies for lectures, seminars and research projects, and the design of computer-based presentation material.

Health Personnel Development

From its inception in 1984, KIMS has provided opportunities to over 1400 medical graduates to embark on postgraduate education in medical specialties. Many of these specialists have taken over the responsibility for

administering specialized health service units and are providing a high level of health care services to the community in Kuwait. Working in tandem with the expatriate health personnel, they provide both curative and preventive services. In addition, a high proportion of Kuwaiti nationals who have joined the academic cadre of the Faculty of Medicine of Kuwait University during the past decade comprise those who had received postgraduate training and obtained the requisite qualifications through the programs arranged by KIMS. They play a major role in the development of health professional resources in Kuwait by contributing to, and also being directly involved in, planning and conducting training programs for medical students.

Licensing Examinations

As a means of ensuring that health professionals who serve in hospitals and clinics in Kuwait possess the essential minimum competencies, and that they keep abreast of the current state and the recent developments for practicing effectively in their chosen fields, Kuwait has introduced a licensing examination. KIMS has been designated as the examinations authority, and a scheme is in place for the Kuwait Medical Licensing Examination (KMLE) to be held. The examination is to be conducted by examiners appointed from the academic staff of the Faculty of Medicine of Kuwait University. A Kuwait Dental Licensing Examination, similar to KMLE, too, is to be held at the same time for licensing dental graduates.

Collaboration with International Institutions

The opportunities arranged for postgraduate training are utilized mainly by Kuwaiti nationals. Additionally, a number of citizens of the other countries that come within the Gulf Cooperation Council have also made use of the training facilities provided. On completion of the training programs, the majority of the latter return to their countries of origin, though some remain in Kuwait for varying periods of time offering their expertise to the Ministry of Health.

KIMS has established close professional relationships with the Royal Colleges of UK and

Ireland that deal with postgraduate training and examinations for medical specialization, and with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. While training programs and examinations in specialties such as medicine, obstetrics & gynecology and radiology are conducted in Kuwait in collaboration with the former institutions, trainees sent on scholarship to Canada enroll in specialist training programs accredited by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and appear for its examinations.

The Kuwait Institute for Medical specialization has admirably lived up to the faith that has been placed in it by those who conceived the establishment of an institution for organizing and monitoring postgraduate training in medicine for Kuwait. Many hospitals and clinics now have Kuwaiti medical specialists offering highly specialized services having received training arranged by KIMS. It is worth noting that approximately half of the specialists produced through these programs, obtaining qualifications of high international reputation are females. The teaching staff of the Faculty of Medicine of Kuwait University has been strengthened with a number of Kuwaiti academics joining its ranks after having been beneficiaries of the opportunities arranged through KIMS. The continuing medical education program ensures that practitioners in the health professions keep themselves abreast of the developments in their specialties. The introduction of a licensing examination would serve as an added measure to ensure that health care delivery in Kuwait is maintained at an optimum standard.

Information and Communication with KIMS

KIMS maintains its web site at www.kims.org.kw, which constitutes an important medium for communication with trainees, program organizers and others interested in postgraduate medical education in Kuwait. The web site also provides a link to a free MEDLINE service that benefits all categories of health professionals.