



Specialists without borders ran a very successful conference/seminar on “medical and surgical emergencies” in Rwanda in the second week of July. The conference ran over three days, with SWB also sponsoring the third day, a science and research day.

Faculty

There were 15 consultants from different countries who all volunteered their time to teach. From Australia they were 11 surgical consultants, covering general, gynaecological, vascular, orthopaedic and ENT surgery. There was a dentist from Tasmania, an American physician, an American ENT professor, a Canadian Anaesthetist, as well as an Italian/American immunologist. In addition a group of nurses accompanied the doctors and ran concurrent nursing teaching programs --also very successfully.

Conference

The conference was held in the Serena Kigali, a hotel which has excellent facilities and is located in the centre of the capital city Kigali,-- which was important given the vast distance that many of the doctors had to travel to come to the conference. Over 110 African doctors committed to the three day event.

The conference was divided up into 20 minute lecturing segments.. This was considered an important feature to maintain interest over the three days. Topics covered the range of emergencies that most might encounter in their particular specialties covering both undergraduate and post graduate material. The full programme can be reviewed on the SWB website. The concern initially was that the programme might be too crowded, however this proved not to be the case, and this format was endorsed by the vast majority of those who attended. It also allowed some time to interact with the doctors, which as they got to know the specialists on the second day became much more interactive.

Educational achievements

SWB has numerous educational objectives of which many were realised at this conference. A full list of these can be obtained from the website, but there were some important milestones in relation to these objectives. There was the successful interaction between visiting consultants and African doctors, and an effective exchange of medical information at both the formal conference level and the informal teaching level. This was as judged by both conference evaluation forms and direct communication feedback from the doctors involved. There was a high level of medical knowledge and teaching efficacy displayed by all consultants who participated, with an ongoing adaptation through the understanding of where students/doctors were at with their local knowledge

An educational baseline has been now developed, from which the current consultants are able to change the level of medical education required in the future. Professional and personal relationships have developed which will allow ongoing exchange of medical information, and the exchange of African doctors in specialty training. It is hopeful therefore that the current format will be able to be developed into a much more effective model in the future given the significant input of both consultants at this conference/seminar and the feedback from participating doctors. It is now appreciated that any future conferences seminars should run over four days with one of those days given to a structured clinical instruction module (SCIM) followed by assessment. It is also hoped to develop a module/curriculum which will allow the progressive development of medical education from a baseline such as was established in this instance. This would also allow a standardisation in the presentation of education at both the graduate and undergraduate level by other consultants who might request to be part of an ongoing SWB medical education program

Rwandan medical school visit/ Butare

While the conference itself was a successful event, a number of other situations arose as a result of the conference which contributed to the overall success of the trip. The establishment of relationships in an informal situation around the conference created invitations to Ward rounds at the large public teaching hospital opposite the conference facility. Many of the consultants found this particularly rewarding, and were able to contribute in a significant way on the ward rounds. It also meant that consultants were introduced to both students and new graduates, allowing the development of bilateral ongoing educational relationships, and possible exchange teaching. Some consultants were then taken out to the peripheral hospitals, which allowed them to evaluate facilities outside the capital. While there was a significant difference in what was available in the poor peripheral hospitals, it also provided an avenue of potential development with visiting Western consultants, especially within orthopaedics.

The invitation to teach at the medical school for a few days provided for the opportunity for visiting consultants to understand both the conditions under which students were taught and patients were treated. The medical school is located very close to the Burundi border. This is about a three hour trip from the capital Kigali. There is a 500 bed hospital associated with the medical school which has a catchment area in excess of one million people. The SWB team was welcomed into a pre-Ward round meeting and then invited to be part of a teaching Ward round. The lack of structure and teaching on the Ward round was a surprise to many consultants, as the ward rounds were left to the junior doctors and were basically working non teaching ward rounds. There was great satisfaction when the SWB specialists turned their working ward rounds into teaching ward rounds and which was hugely appreciated by the students and doctors. The range of pathology that they were able to teach on and that they were consulted on by resident specialists, varied from spinal injuries, ENT, orthopaedics, Gynae-a through to acute abdomen's and vascular problems. One of the consultants had such a following and was enjoying it to such an extent that some of us wondered whether what we would in actual fact get him back to where we were staying.

Chasing the Gorillas

But there were also other aspects which made this trip into something a bit more special. The visit to the gorillas was a special highlight. Trekking through the bush to be able to sit with a 200 kg silverback gorilla and his family of many females and children, as they milled around you and looked you in the eye from 1 or 2 metres distance I'm sure is a memory that will remain with everyone forever. I think the photos are worth a thousand words.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this teaching conference was successful on many fronts and has established a very firm platform on which to progress the concept of graduate and postgraduate teaching through specialists without borders. Not to be undervalued is the experience of sharing with a group of consultants, who are all like-minded in wanting to improve medical education by giving of their time and effort, perhaps best summarized by Kate Drummond neurosurgeon thus "What a joy it was to interact with colleagues who work in such a different place but with whom we had so much in common in terms of clinical, personal and training challenges. We could all have so much to offer each other in the future."

There was also a camaraderie which I think will remain with many for a considerable number of years and hopefully promote an individual response to the medical education in developing countries.

Future

There was a real enthusiasm amongst specialists that this was an effective way that they could contribute, a way that fitted into their otherwise very busy lives. There was a consensus that this was also a very effective way of improving medical standards in areas



where those who did not have the higher education facilities that are taken as the accepted norm in Australasia. Further that as a concept teaching in this format should be developed and exported into those countries who wanted to supplement their own medical education with visiting specialists.

SWB then will now work to develop the educational model, to refine it with feedback from the specialists who participated and to look to expand it not only into Africa but the Asia Pacific. Those specialists who are interested in teaching will be invited to register through the SWB website, while industry will be approached to provide further corporate sponsorship, thereby allowing these seminar conferences to be conducted at minimal cost to the participating doctors. Those organizations who feel that they might well benefit from such a teaching programme will be able to contact the committee of SWB through the website to arrange country/organization specific teaching conference/seminars/workshops/assessments.