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Improving the health workforce situation with a new cadre of pharmaceutical dispensers

A one-year course mitigates the low staff retention and shortage of qualified supply staff at primary health facility level in rural areas

Results

- A new and accredited course for lower cadre pharmaceutical staff started in 2016
- Renovated pharmacy laboratories for dispenser students
- Two new lecturers employed for dispenser course
- A PPP between a private University and the public health sector
- 497 students enrolled to date
- 70% of participants are female
- Graduates are employed in the public sector

Pharmaceutical staff have multiple and critical roles in the health system, ensuring the population's continuous access to good quality and affordable medicines. As medicines are a lucrative business, the highest standards of ethics and accountability are required. The general crisis of the health workforce in Tanzania is reflected in critical shortages of pharmacy staff at all levels of the public health system in Dodoma. The HPSS project situation analysis in 2011 showed that in 95% out of 247 facilities surveyed, medicines management was done by non-pharmaceutically trained cadres comprising clinical officers, nurses and medical attendants whose main task is clinical care of patients. It is within this context that the Ministry of Health is changing the current knowledge-based curricula to outcomes/competence-based curricula with a flexible mode of delivery and assessment. It is expected that with these curricula, the country can achieve the objective of having pharmaceutical technicians, who could effectively assist to meet the demands of the health sector.

A modular approach

St John's University of Tanzania (SJUT) together with HPSS responded to the observed situation and to the Pharmacy Council of Tanzania's decision to establish a modular one-year course for pharmacy dispensers to address the critical shortage of basic pharmaceutical staff in Tanzania. The basic certificate course in Pharmaceutical Sciences is a two-semester programme, which



Medicine Dispenser Certificate Course

A 2- semester course in Pharmaceutical Sciences



Accredited by Pharmacy Council of Tanzania
Supported by:



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Marketing flyer for Dispenser course at SJUT



Students at the library of SJUT

has been developed and accredited to suit the needs of the health sector, the labour market demands and professional needs that exist in the country. The modular programme offers an opportunity to progress to higher levels of pharmaceutical expertise such as pharmaceutical assistant and technician, hence providing a career ladder for dispenser graduates. It includes a total of 40 weeks of study divided in two semesters: twenty three (23) weeks set aside for theoretical training and seventeen (17) designated for pharmacy practice, i.e. field work in dispensing and stores management. This level is meant to teach basic pharmaceutical sciences knowledge, skills and appropriate attitudes.

Relieving clinical staff

The aim of this training programme is to produce adequately trained pharmacy staff who will work predominantly in lower primary health care (PHC) facilities such as dispensaries and health centres and who will participate in the provision of basic pharmaceutical services as medicine dispensers. One main objective in terms of HRH management is retention of this new cadre in rural areas, supporting health care at PHC level. Clinical staff that so far had to dedicate part of their working time to managing medicines supply will now be able to fully attend to their patients. The increased patient consultation time will improve quality of health care services.

A win-win situation

The purpose of the signed MoU is to express the agreement between the two parties whereas SJUT receives financial and technical assistance from HPSS to support the establishment of a pharmaceutical one-year course for dispensers, while HPSS will be allocated a certain number of spaces for candidates from their regions of interest who will be charged only 50% of the tuition fees. In addition, HPSS supported the renovation of laboratories needed for practical studies.

Principles of this MoU derive from a partnership and collaboration which entails a public-private partnership (PPP) reflecting the vision and aim of SJUT, res-



Dispenser laboratory has been renovated

pecting the Tanzanian Health Sector Strategic Plan (HSSP IV) and aiming at sustainability of the proposed programme.

The concept of a basic dispenser cadre was first formulated by the Pharmacy Board of Tanzania, several years ago. Karin Wiedenmayer, component leader for medicines management at the HPSS project, emphasizes the underlying rationale that “PHC facilities don’t need academic pharmacists but practically trained medicines supply staff, allowing clinicians to focus on patient care. That is the gap this new cadre of dispensers will fill in Dodoma”.



Dodoma Health Project Tanzania - Background

Health Promotion and System Strengthening (HPSS) or Tuimarisha Afya Project is part of the development cooperation between Tanzania and Switzerland. The HPSS project was launched in 2011 and supports Dodoma Region in the areas of health insurance, community health promotion, pharmaceutical management and management of maintenance and repair services for a period of 10 years. The project is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH).

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