

Svend Capol, President of SolidarMed

"15 by 2015" petition – access to Family Medicine for the poorest on the globe



In sub-Saharan Africa Family Medicine, as such, is limited to urban areas. General private practices are only found in bigger cities, far out of reach for the poorest people. In the rural setting, hospitals, health centers and primary health care teams are the providers of first line medical services, mainly delivered by clinical officers and nurses in health centers, or by doctors and assistant medical officers at district level in

hospitals. Regarding health, the greatest challenges for these remote regions are lack of qualified staff (brain drain!), access (including transport) and poverty.

By promoting the development, improvement, and long-term security of primary health care, SolidarMed has a significant share in empowering even people in the poorest countries of Africa to exercise their right to health and in making health become operative as a developmental factor.

In order to address the constraints given through chronic brain drain and to improve access and the availability of medical services, SolidarMed has committed itself to the Medical Licentiates (ML) program in Zambia, which is a good example of a general approach to sustainable provision of Primary Care in the sense of the "15 by 2015" campaign.

The ML program is a postgraduate course for trained Clinical Officers with two years of professional experience. It takes a total of 3 years and is made up of 6 months of theory classes and 4 practical training units that are carried out in different training hospitals. The training is completed with a one year internship. The ML program provides a deeper understanding of the fields of internal medicine, pediatrics, gynecology and surgery and enables students to diagnose and operate, as well as manage and run district hospitals (level 1 hospitals). Compared with a university degree in medicine, the MLs can be trained **two times faster and for half the cost**. In addition, the **training is only recognized within the region, so it reduces migration and has a positive effect on the enormous need for doctors in Zambia**. Comparable training programs can be found in neighboring countries such as Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique. The names and descriptions of the training programs may be different but the objective and hopes placed in these postgraduate courses are the same in all the countries. In Mozambique, a study on 2000 caesarean section operations con-

firmed that there was no difference between operations carried out by university-trained doctors and those carried out by non-university-trained doctors (Medical Licentiates).

In order to achieve the overall goal of attainable, guaranteed, cost-effective and affordable access to quality basic health care for Zambian families through this project, two main lines of action are followed by SolidarMed:

- Support of Chainama College, Lusaka, which is responsible for the practical and theoretical training of MLs, to improve quality of training, increase the number of trained and practicing MLs working in outlying district hospitals and to build capacity at the College in the area of planning, monitoring and reporting. The aim is that 80% of MLs will work in the rural Zambian health care system for at least 5 years. Primarily the rural population and, in particular, children and women of reproductive age will benefit from their presence through improved access to general basic health care.
- Support of district hospitals to meet the standards required for accreditation for the ML program. This includes employment of specialists for adequate on-site training in the fields of internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, the set-up of infrastructure and equipment for procedures, student accommodation and also the running of key units such as a laboratory and x-ray facilities. These investments and the increased number of medical interventions in the specialist areas offered at the training hospitals are also positive for the population served by the training hospital.

The postgraduate Medical Licentiates course is a national training program and fully meets the requirements and expectations of the Zambian Ministry of Health and is an ideal target for the "15 by 2015" campaign. It is not only Chainama College, the Medical Licentiates and the accredited hospitals that will benefit. Most of all, through this ML program sustainable comprehensive primary health care will be accessible and affordable in one of the poorest regions of the world.

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