

VIEWPOINT

A Doctor of My Own: A Documentary Film on Medical Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

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The World Health Organization estimates that at the time of the Ebola outbreak, only 1 to 2 doctors were available to treat every 100,000 people in the 3 hardest-hit countries.¹ Epidemics such as this underlie the long-standing health care emergency in Sub-Saharan Africa and have led to increased attention to capacitating medical education as a sustainable part of the solution. To document the unique set of issues involved in shaping the success of a new Sub-Saharan African medical school, a small camera crew embedded themselves among students at the recently opened University of Namibia School of Medicine for 8 weeks to produce an investigative film on the challenges and breakthroughs in the development process.

A Doctor of My Own investigates 3 themes of relevance to current medical education in Africa. The first is innovations in teaching doctors within resource-limited settings, including a unique “community excursion program” that the documentary explores as part of the students’ third year. Designed to inform students of the needs of poorly funded rural health care in their own country, the immersion program provides a unique and, as the film reveals, demanding hands-on approach to student education. The second theme is the importance of developing context-specific medical competency

training and curricula that reflect the local community. Because of the immense shortage of available health care workers, the film furthermore highlights interprofessional learning and teamwork between nurses and medical students. Additionally, the film analyzes incentives aimed to stem the “brain drain” out of Sub-Saharan Africa. Interviews of health care workers and students in village clinics express that adequate lifestyle factors and availability of medical resources—more than monetary compensation—are an incentive to remain working in the villages. The documentary also examines the admission policy’s “regional quota system,” established in an effort to recruit and retain more students from the communities that the school eventually wants its doctors to serve.

This documentary provides a novel and provocative visual examination of empowerment through medical education, and offers insights that can assist in the development of emerging health professional schools in other resource-limited settings.

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REFERENCE

1. Unprecedented Number of Medical Staff Infected with Ebola. World Health Organization. Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/ebola/25-august-2014/en/>; 2014. Accessed February, 10 2015.

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