

Global News Item

Global news: building a rheumatology team for East Africa

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Rheumatology key message

- Initiatives to improve health care for patients such as those with rheumatic diseases is best developed and supported within ECSACoP.

We welcome the call for action by Genga et al for building a much-needed rheumatology service for East Africa [1]. Physicians from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe with their governmental approval and supported by the Royal College of Physicians of London set up the East, Central and Southern Africa College of Physicians (ECSACoP) in July 2016. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/east-central-and-south-ern-africa-college-physicians-ecsacop>.

Other countries in the region have expressed interest in joining ECSACoP. It is rewriting the way in which post-graduate medical education is delivered and assessed in the region. The number of physicians registered with ECSACoP is 392 (Table 1) but the total number of physicians in the six member countries does not exceed one thousand.

The aim is to increase the number of physicians in training by 50% by 2025, double the number by 2030, harmonise standards across the region and positively impact 200 million lives. With a common curriculum and standardised training methodologies, the college's postgraduate medical qualification will be accepted as the standard throughout the region.

This is a college without frontiers, with a faculty from a multitude of nations learning and developing together, sharing experience, and refining curricula for future physicians that will go on to lead health systems across the region. This new cadre of physicians will be better trained and equipped to lead, manage and steward available resources that can dramatically improve health outcomes for all, especially those in remote or difficult-to-reach communities.

TABLE 1 The number of physicians in member countries of ECSACoP

Country	Number of physicians
Kenya	87
Malawi	21
Tanzania	37
Uganda	160
Zambia	37
Zimbabwe	47
Other countries	3
Total	392

This has to be paralleled by expanding the number of health workers, and transforming their education at the same time, to accelerate health equity and inclusive economic growth. We believe that initiatives to improve health care for patients such as those with rheumatic diseases is best developed and supported within ECSACoP.

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Reference

- 1 Genga EK, Moots RJ, Oyoo OG, Otieno FO. Building a rheumatology team for East Africa; A call for action! *Rheumatology* 2017;56:1441–2.

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