

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Meeting the neurology demand: the impact of early exposure and mentorship on African medical students

Nicholas Aderinto^{1*}

To the Editor

Neurological disorders represent Africa's growing public health challenge [1]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), these conditions account for a significant portion of the disease burden on the continent [2]. However, the number of neurologists in Africa is disproportionately low compared to the population's needs [3]. The presence of trained neurologists in Africa is far below the global average, with a ratio of 0.03 neurologists per 100,000 people, in stark contrast to Europe's 8.45 neurologists per 100,000 individuals [3]. This shortage is further exacerbated by the high prevalence of neurological diseases on the continent. In addition to the scarcity of neurologists, neurology societies exist in less than 50% of sub-Saharan African countries, and there is a shortage of critical sub-specialized services, such as neuroradiology, stroke units, neurologic rehabilitation, electromyography, and electroencephalography [3]. Bridging this gap requires fostering early exposure to neurology and providing mentorship opportunities for African medical students.

One of the primary contributors to the need for neurologists in Africa is the limited exposure that medical students receive to the field during their training [4]. Many regional medical schools provide minimal or no dedicated neurology rotations or experiences. Consequently,

students often graduate with little knowledge or interest in this specialised field, perpetuating the shortage of neurologists [4].

Early exposure to neurology can be transformative. Medical students who can explore neurology during their training are likelier to develop an interest in the field. This exposure can take various forms, including dedicated neurology rotations, lectures, workshops, and clinical experiences. These opportunities allow students to interact with patients affected by neurological disorders, witness their challenges and appreciate the profound impact that neurologists can have on their lives.

Mentorship also plays a pivotal role in shaping medical students' career choices. Access to experienced neurologists who can serve as mentors and guides can be a game-changer [5]. These mentors can provide valuable insights into the practice of neurology, share their passion for the field, and offer crucial advice on pursuing a career in neurology. Beyond nurturing interest and passion, mentorship can help students navigate the often challenging path to becoming a neurologist. Neurology is a complex and demanding speciality that requires dedication and perseverance [6]. Mentors can offer guidance on the educational requirements, residency programs, and professional development opportunities essential for success in the field.

Several initiatives and organisations are actively working to address the shortage of neurologists in Africa by promoting early exposure and mentorship. For example, the World Federation of Neurology (WFN) has partnered with medical schools and neurologists across the continent to establish neurology education programs and provide mentorship opportunities [7]. These programs aim

*Correspondence:

Nicholas Aderinto
nicholasoluwaseyi6@gmail.com

¹ Department of Medicine and Surgery, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, PMB 5000, Ogbomoshosho, Nigeria



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to inspire medical students to pursue careers in neurology and provide them with the support and guidance they need. Furthermore, more international collaborations can be pivotal in expanding access to neurology education and mentorship in Africa. One example of an international collaboration involved in neurology education and mentorship in Africa is the African Neurology Initiative (ANI) [8]. This initiative is a partnership between the World Federation of Neurology (WFN) and the American Academy of Neurology (AAN), aimed at improving neurologic care and education in Africa. Academic and healthcare organisations from other regions can partner with African institutions to share resources, expertise, and best practices in neurology education. These collaborations can facilitate the development of robust neurology training programs and mentorship networks.

Addressing the pressing demand for neurologists in Africa necessitates a concerted effort to provide medical students with early exposure to the field and mentorship opportunities.

Abbreviations

WFN World Federation of Neurology
WHO World Health Organization

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