

AFREhealth nursing student exchanges in partnership with GEMx

Anna Lacone and Faith Nawagi summarise outcomes of nursing student exchanges in sub-Saharan Africa

Global exposure in health professional training is a key component in promoting transformative educational approaches through short-term electives.^{1,2} For years Africa has served as a host to various nursing students from all regions of the world. The education training is provided through electives and internships at African nursing institutions, hospitals and non-government organisations.² However, African nursing students have limited access to the opportunities available to nursing students from developed countries due to the high costs associated with going on an international elective in a developed country.^{3,4} To address this gap, GEMx, the global educational exchange in medicine and the health professions, a service of the Educational Commission of Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), launched a South-South, student nursing elective exchange pilot, in partnership with the African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) and their member institutions. The goal of the pilot was to provide African nursing students with access to affordable elective exchange opportunities on the African continent to: 1) gain global exposure and enhanced global perspectives; 2) acquire transferable knowledge and skillsets applicable back home; 3) contribute towards their personal and professional development.

The framework used to develop and launch the pilot was:

1. The formation of intra-institutional partnerships amongst AFREhealth nursing schools to offer elective exchanges and host students;
2. Use of the GEMx web-based system to centralise and operationalise all aspects of elective management and student application processes;
3. Adherence to the GEMx Charter, a multi-lateral binding agreement amongst intra-institutional partners;
4. All tuition and administrative fees waived by participating institutions to help defray student costs going on an international elective exchange;
5. Student financial mini-grants provided by ECFMG to defray student expenses associated with going on an international elective exchange; and,
6. Technical and administrative support personnel provided by ECFMG GEMx's coordination office based in Kampala, Uganda.

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The five AFREhealth member institutions that participated in the nursing exchange pilot (April 2017 to December 2018) were:

1. Ekwendeni College of Health Sciences, Malawi
2. Kamuzu College of Nursing, Malawi
3. Lusaka School of Nursing and Midwifery, Zambia
4. Makerere University College of the Health Sciences, Uganda
5. Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, Tanzania

From April 2017 through December 2018, 34 nursing students have gone on electives in another country. The chart below provides a breakdown of the elective specialties taken by nursing students.

Pilot outcomes

ECFMG surveyed AFREhealth leadership, deans, faculty members and GEMx programme managers (n=10). All respondents agreed that GEMx contributed to enhancing international exposure for their own students. All agreed there is a need for GEMx to continue their role as a facilitator. Nine of ten of respondents agreed that GEMx contributes to breaking mobility barriers that exist in various African countries. In addition, nine agreed that GEMx added value to the network.¹

Each nursing student completed an ECFMG post-elective survey (n=34). According to the results, all the students confirmed that the elective exchange was their first time travelling outside of their home country. All said they gained exposure to new health systems and that they gained knowledge that was transferable to their home country. The average cost of a four-week elective was \$1,275. Almost all (94%) of the students agreed that they received adequate faculty supervision during their exchange. Almost all (94%) of the students agreed they had opportunities to voice challenges. Almost all (94%) of the students received suggested strategies from faculty supervisors when practicing patient care.²

According to their individual reports submitted to ECFMG, all the nursing students described their experience as transformative. Students gained additional skills and knowledge transferrable to their home country. Students reported that they were exposed to diseases similar to those back home. Students reported that they built a professional network through the exchange. Students reported an appreciation for the differences and similarities in health care delivery and health systems to which they were exposed. Students reported that they garnered interest in becoming a global change agent when they return home through advocacy, research and



Nurses learning in a student-centred environment

best practices, to name a few. All the nursing exchange students reported that the exchange opportunity was their first global exposure to a different health care system.² Each elective was one month in duration.

AFREhealth and ECFMG agreed to continue their partnership as a result of the outcomes from the pilot. Four additional schools joined GEMx in 2019, expanding the nursing network to a total of 9 nursing schools/institutions. They are:

1. Arthur Davidson Children's Hospital, School of Nursing, Zambia
2. Mildmay Institute of Health Sciences, Uganda
3. School of Midwifery Bo (sombo), Sierra Leone
4. University of Ibadan, Dept of Nursing, Nigeria

From 1 January through 31 August 2019, an additional 10 nursing students have gone on electives in another country; 24 nursing students are scheduled to take an elective beginning September 2019 through December 2019. A total of 68 nursing exchanges are expected for the period April 2017 through December

2019. AFREhealth recently appointed GEMx as the implementing arm for student exchanges, a way forward towards AFREhealth's capacity-building efforts across the African continent.

Conclusion

The nursing student exchange pilot provided accessible and affordable elective exchange opportunities for African nursing students across the continent. Nursing students have gained global exposure and enhanced their knowledge, skills and global perspectives which contributed to their professional and personal development. Additional nursing schools and institutions have joined GEMx to expand the network. Other streams of funding towards student financial mini-grants must be identified to grow and sustain the programme. More research is needed to ascertain the long-term impact on nursing students who participate in an international elective in Africa. The ECFMG GEMx platform can be replicated in other regions of the world with the potential to form a global nursing network through partnerships.

About AFREhealth

The African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) is a non-profit organisation headquartered in Kumasi, Ghana. AFREhealth is an interdisciplinary health professional grouping that seeks to work with Ministries of Health, training institutions and other stakeholders to improve the quality of health care in Africa through research, education and capacity building. AFREhealth's vision is ensure a responsive health workforce for providing relevant high quality, evidence based healthcare in Africa.

About ECFMG

ECFMG is a private, nonprofit organisation headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States of America. The ECFMG promotes quality health care for the public by certifying international medical graduates for entry into US graduate medical education, and by participating in the evaluation and certification of other physicians and health care professionals nationally and internationally.

The Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research (FAIMER) was established in 2000 by ECFMG. In partnership with ECFMG and other organisations worldwide, FAIMER promotes excellence in international health professions education through programmatic and research activities.

GEMx is a service programme of ECFMG FAIMER. GEMx is a global partnership for educational exchange in medicine and the health professions. GEMx's Partners are medical schools, associations and other institutions around the world that share a commitment to making international exchange a part of their education programmes and to providing students in medicine and the health professions with increased access to exchange opportunities.

References

1. Source: ECFMG GEMx Survey, June 2018
2. Source: ECFMG GEMx Student, Post-Elective Survey

I need you here...

Taking your HIV medication EVERY DAY can help you be here when I grow up. I heard there's a "Triple Pill" that can make it easier.



**Take a Triple a Day.
Every Day.**

Ask your Doctor if there is a Triple Pill for YOU.

The 2014 Namibian Guidelines for Antiretroviral Therapy and The World Health Organization recommend Fixed-Dose Combination Therapy Consolidated Guidelines on the Use of Antiretroviral Drugs for Treating and Preventing HIV Infection, Geneva, World Health Organization, 2013, (<http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/guidelines/arv2013/en>)

