Joint inspections boost medical schools

By Owen Wagabaza

Medical doctors can now move and work freely within the East African region as per the East African Common Market Protocol.

The protocol provides for the movement of persons and free movement of workers.

Unlike other professions that only required one to provide their qualifications before getting a work permit, medical doctors had to sit for an exam before getting a practicing licence from that country's regulatory body, the medical and dental council.

However, this has since stopped and medical doctors can now freely work in any country in East Africa without being subjected to exams.

This was after the medical and dental practitioners council officials from the East African region came up with ways that can help the medical doctors benefit from the EAC Common Market Protocol. After a number of deliberations, the officials zeroed on a core curriculum and joint inspections.

"We wondered how they can move freely when we know nothing about their training,"

A medical student using a microscope during an examination

says Dr Katumba Ssentongo, the Registrar General of the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council.

"The core curriculum meant that there are some basics that everyone who wished to do medicine or dental surgery must do. We also agreed to see where this teaching takes place and this was to be done by inspecting these institutions jointly as the East African Community Medical Council. To effectively achieve

this goal, we came up with a checklist," Dr Ssentongo adds.

Ssentongo says they called the medical deans in East Africa and tasked them with coming up with a checklist. The aim was that the deans own the checklist.
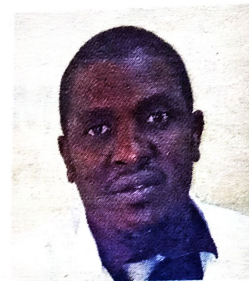
"They are East Africans, they know what we can afford and what we cannot. We, therefore, sat together and came up with minimum requirements for starting/running a medical school in

East Africa," Ssentongo says.

Since 2011/2012, the East African Medical Council has been inspecting universities jointly as the EAC Medical Council.

Impact

According to Dr Fr Christopher Mukidi, the Registrar of Uganda Martyrs University Nkozi, the joint inspection brings medical personnel together and this has helped in enforcing the

same standards throughout the region.

"It has also improved on the quality, as well as the marketability of the physicians or doctors in the region. The medical schools are also able to share best practices, including research," Mukidi says.

Dr Hakim Ssendagiire, the dean, school of medicine at the Islamic University in Uganda, says joint inspections enable institutions to share ideas on how they can improve the quality of teaching in medical schools around the region.

He adds that because of the standardisation, medical schools are producing graduates acceptable in the entire region without being subjected to exams before getting licences to practice.

"Previously, one would graduate from Makerere University and still sit for

Ssendagiire

exams before getting a practicing licence if one wanted to work outside Uganda," he says.

Ssendagire is of the view that the idea is adopted by the entire African continent so that standards are the same allover Africa.

"It can do wonders, it can take African health care to another level," Ssendagire says.

Ssentongo explains that the joint inspection has put a stop on substandard doctors.

"Before, people would point at a medical school and say it produces substandard doctors, this is no longer possible, all institutions have to follow the set guidelines, or else they are closed," he says.

Ssentongo adds that not even President Yoweri Museveni can intervene when an institution is closed. The only option is, therefore, to meet all the requirements on the checklist.

The joint inspection idea is being scrutinised by the European Union.

"They are closely looking at it. They have been benchmarking for the past few years, with the view of borrowing the idea so that the entire Europe can have one inspection body, unlike now where each country is inspecting its own medical schools," Ssentongo says.