

Medical Education in Libya: A Five-Decade Journey and Future Prospects

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Introduction

Since the establishment of medical faculties in Benghazi and Tripoli in the early 1970s, medical education in Libya has developed significantly. Led by prominent national figures and medical experts, these institutions quickly forged connections with prestigious universities worldwide. This foundation was based on high academic standards, with curricula and evaluation processes modeled after global best practices. From the outset, English was designated as the medium of instruction.

Initially, the faculty at these institutions comprised mostly foreign and Arab professors. Over time, qualified Libyan educators joined, bringing academic credentials in basic sciences and clinical specialties from respected programs in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, Canada, France, and Sweden. These educators were essential in advancing clinical training within hospitals, despite challenges in integrating medical education into the healthcare system due to limited support from health facility administrators.

Throughout these decades, many medical graduates had the opportunity to study abroad, where they made significant contributions and enhanced Libya's reputation internationally. However, in the late 1990s, political and economic challenges led to reduced opportunities for overseas training. To address this, Libya established the Medical Specialties Council to facilitate local clinical postgraduate training. The Council now offers programs in 25 specializations, awarding over 2,200 Libyan Fellowship Certificates to graduates qualified to work as specialists in health facilities across the country. Recognized as the highest national credential in clinical sciences, this certificate enables holders to serve as specialists in Libyan health facilities and as faculty in Libyan universities, equivalent to an academic doctorate.

Proposals for Developing Medical Education in Libya

Given the global advances in medical education and the need to enhance healthcare services for Libyan citizens, reforms are essential to ensure the quality of medical education. The following proposals aim to address challenges and support future progress:

1. Undergraduate Medical Education

Streamlining Medical Colleges: The number of medical colleges should be carefully regulated, with a focus on quality over quantity, supported by adequate infrastructure.

Enrollment Management: Admission processes should align with each college's capacity to ensure quality education.

Faculty Development: The recruitment of qualified faculty for foundational courses and clinical training is crucial, along with financial support for teaching allowances and scientific promotions to foster research.

Equivalence of Specializations: Specialized certificates, including fellowships and board certifications, should be formally equated with doctoral degrees as per national regulations.

Hospital Preparedness: Medical colleges need to coordinate with the Ministry of Health to prepare hospitals and medical centers for student training.

Financial Support: Given the costs of medical education, dedicated budgets should be allocated to provide essential resources, maintain equipment, and achieve accreditation from the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME).

Curriculum Development: Regular updates to curricula, teaching methodologies, and evaluation practices are necessary to keep pace with global standards.

2. Postgraduate Medical Education

Strengthening the Medical Specialties Council: Sufficient funding is required to support training activities, especially programs that improve curriculum, evaluation methods, and training center standards.

Support for Trainers: Training faculty should receive fair compensation for their contributions, especially in light of current economic challenges in Libya.

Professional Development: Partnerships with suppliers of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals could facilitate workshops and conferences to enhance training quality.

Training Center Accreditation: Commitment to high standards in training centers and the development of specialty programs will foster an advanced learning environment.

Research Collaboration: A strong partnership between universities and the Medical Specialties Council is necessary to advance research, focusing on both academic and clinical postgraduate studies.

Specialization Standards: Libyan clinical specialization should follow global standards, with at least five years of integrated hospital training, while avoiding over-reliance on clinical master's degrees, which may not provide adequate practical experience.

Department of Medical Education: The establishment of a Medical Education Department within the Ministry of Higher Education could streamline medical education initiatives across universities.

Exploring a Medical University: Given current challenges, the development of a dedicated medical university may be a viable solution to address educational and healthcare needs in Libya.

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