

Proposing continuing medical education for the Pacific

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Abstract

In response to a request from the Pacific Basin Medical Association and the Micronesian Medical Council, the Faculty of Medicine and Health Science at the University of Auckland, are developing a distance learning postgraduate programme (Masters of Medical Science), for Micronesia. The health care model in the Pacific Basin promotes de-centralised community-based preventative or clinical medicine alongside a high standard of secondary care in the hospital service. Medical Practitioners often operate in relative isolation, dealing with a diverse range of needs, many of which arise infrequently. The Masters of Medical Science Programme emphasises the integration of public health and clinical practice and the importance of comprehensive patient, family and community medical care. A key focus of the programme is the integration of public health principles into all relevant clinical areas, for example: paediatrics papers covers public health aspects of care as well as clinical principles in child health. The teaching approach will be finalised after establishing an understanding of budgets, teaching needs and available communication hardware. It is anticipated the programme will utilise a combination of written materials, on-site tutor visits, public health and clinical workbooks, audiotapes, videotapes, audiovisual conferencing, internet groups, regular tutor response to email requests, teleconferencing, telemedicine and interac-

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tive internet access and CDs etc. A key element to the teaching process is self-directed learning, and a clinical workbook will assist in this. Assessment of the course and students are along the lines and standards of the University of Auckland.

Introduction

In response to a request from the Pacific Basin Medical Association and the Micronesian Medical Council, the Faculty of Medicine and Health Science at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, developed a proposal to provide a distance learning postgraduate programme for Micronesia; this would be known as a Masters of Medical Science (distance learning). The Faculty has a commitment to developments to improve the health of Pacific Nation's peoples.

The core responsibility for the proposed programme would sit with the Goodfellow Postgraduate Unit in the Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care, and the Pacific Health Programme in the Department of Maori and Pacific Health.

The health care model in the Pacific Basin promotes de-centralised community-based preventative or clinical medicine alongside a high standard of secondary care in the hospital service. Medical practitioners often operate in relative isolation, dealing with a diverse range of needs, many of which arise infrequently. Delivery of competent medical services requires high levels of training, self-sufficiency, self-directed learning and dedication.

The three Micronesian nations, made up of 6 jurisdictions, have a medical service staffed by at least 88 medical practitioners, all of whom are registered with their own national government and with the Micronesian Medical Council. The Medical Practitioners are graduates of various training establishments with a range of basic qualifications. The workforce is thus diverse and practices promoted in training institutes may not be appropriate in the countries of Micronesia.

The Micronesian Medical Council and the Pacific Basin medical Association have recognised the need for a well-

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organised, culturally sensitive, affordable community-family medicine residency programme. To meet this requirement, the masters of medical science (distance learning) would emphasise the integration of public health and clinical practice and the importance of comprehensive patient, family and community medical care.

The Goodfellow Unit has an established reputation, in New Zealand, of initiating and maintaining Distance Learning Programmes for Family Physicians: having developed programmes in Community Accident and Emergency, Geriatrics and Sports Medicine.

The anticipated programme would largely draw on papers available in existing postgraduate courses taught by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, and new papers would be designed around Micronesian community needs. A key focus of the planned programme is to be the integration of public health principles into all relevant clinical areas, for example: paediatrics. Papers would cover public health aspects of care as well as clinical principles in child health.

An appropriate teaching approach for the Practitioners is needed, and this would be finalised after establishing a comprehensive understanding of budgets, teaching needs and available communication hardware.

It is anticipated that the programme will utilise some combination of the following teaching approaches:

- Written materials
- On-site tutor visits
- Public Health and Clinical Workbook
- Audiotapes
- Videotapes
- Audiovisual Conferencing
- Internet Groups
- Regular tutor access and ready response to email requests

- Teleconferencing to appropriately equipped centres
- Telemedicine
- Use of current technology: Interactive Internet access, CD-ROMS (reason for using them is to facilitate use of graphics, which take a long time on Internet), case studies (by way of threaded discussions), interactive quizzes, resource materials, searchable databases. Internet facilities combine with video teaching material that assist in e.g. practical procedures. Self-assessing interactive CD-ROMS.

Conclusion

A key element to the teaching process will be self-directed learning. A clinical workbook would be essential in assisting in this.

Assessment of the course would be made of each of the students, along the lines of the standards of the University of Auckland.

With the set-up and successful completion of this programme, it is intended that it could well be adapted to other countries in the Pacific. Other programmes could also be considered, such as (for example) a Diploma in Tropical and Travel Medicine.

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References

Available from the author on request. □

At every step the child should be allowed to meet the real
experience of life; the thorns should never be plucked from
the roses.

Ellen Key (1849 - 1926)