

Postgraduate orthopaedic curriculum development in Guyana

Guyana is a small country situated on the northern coast of South America. It was a British colony until 1966, and is the only English-speaking country in the continent. Culturally and historically it has more in common with the West Indies, and is a member of the Caribbean Community (Caricom). It has a population of approximately 780,000, mostly concentrated along the coast, although there are settlements in the “interior” of the country, linked to mining and forestry. It is often referred to as the Land of Six Peoples because of the diverse ethnicity of its population; Europeans (mostly British), Africans, Indians, Chinese, descendants of Portuguese indentured labourers and native Amerindians. The word Guyana is derived from an Amerindian word meaning “land of many waters”.

Guyana currently has approximately 2.1 doctors per 10,000 people (compared to 2.8 per 1,000 people in the UK). Prior to the establishment of the School of Medicine in the University of Guyana in 1985, Guyanese who wished to study medicine did so abroad, in countries such as the UK, India, the Soviet Union and Cuba. The Guyana Public Hospital Corporation (GHPC), the large referral and teaching hospital in Georgetown, established a two year Diploma programme in Orthopaedics & Traumatology in 2009. Whilst this was a huge step forward, the specialists it produced were not necessarily prepared for independent practice without further training. Despite this, the programme was quite successful, producing ten graduates who are still working in the speciality in Guyana.

I proposed to the (now defunct) British Orthopaedic Association Training Standards Committee that we could use the UK Trauma & Orthopaedic Curriculum as a template for developing a four year Masters in Orthopaedics and Traumatology programme, as requested by the local surgeons. Professor Philip Turner, past president of the BOA, kindly agreed to this. The current British curriculum was duly adapted to suit Guyanese requirements. In this endeavour I received enormous help from Dr Khan, a senior orthopaedic surgeon at GPHC, and Lisa Hadfield-Law, educational advisor to the BOA. The new curriculum was accepted by the University of Guyana in 2018.

Seven residents have been admitted to the programme since then, and currently there are four in the first year, two in the second and one in the third year of training.

We continue to face challenges in implementing the new curriculum, as is to be expected. The new ways of supervision and assessment are strange and unfamiliar, and are not yet fully understood or accepted by residents or faculty.

Faculty development is also an important area to focus on when introducing a new curriculum. There are only a few senior surgeons at GPHC, who are all dedicated to the development of an excellent programme, and who are very forward thinking in their approach. However they already have very busy clinical commitments. Their workload has suddenly increased exponentially with the start of the Masters programme.

Nonetheless we persevere, in the hope and expectation that this new curriculum will improve patient care and academic practice in Guyana.